The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project

AMBASSADOR PHILIP M. KAISER

Interviewed by: Charles Stuart Kennedy

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Q: Today is the 4th of May 2005. This is an interview with Philip M. Kaiser. This is being done on behalf of the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training. I'm Charles Stuart Kennedy.

To begin, when and where were you born?

KAISER: I was born in New York, Brooklyn, New York, July 12, 1913.

Q: Tell me something about your family. Let's take your father's side first and then your mother's side.

KAISER: My father was born and brought up in a little village in the Ukraine. He came to America after the Kishinev massacres. I don't know if you're familiar with that.

Q: I have heard reference to it. This is one of the pogroms of the czar. Who was the czar at the time?

KAISER: Nicholas II. The interesting thing about Kishinev was that Teddy Roosevelt was president and he attacked the Russians for this massacre. It got a lot of publicity. My father had an uncle here who immigrated to the United States in the 1880s, I think it was '86 or '87, the year before the big blizzard in New York City, whose two daughters married very prosperous young men who were in the real estate business; as we say in London, the property business. My father came over in 1903 and fell in love with the country. Not difficult, gave his circumstances. He had already fathered four kids.

Q: This is your father?

KAISER: Yes. He stayed awhile and brought his wife over, my mother, in 1907. She stayed a year and produced another child, but didn't like it here. She thought it was not religious enough. She was very orthodox, very religious. She went back and said she wouldn't return, and exacted from her husband, my father, a promise that he would follow her back. He had been in the lumber business with his father and brother there. He made a promise that he would try to accumulate, enough money to advance his interest back in the lumber business. But he made that promise reluctantly. His brother, who was apparently a pretty attractive character, but that's beside the story, died early in that year, unexpectedly. My father felt that this ended his commitment, that it was no longer valid. Obviously he was looking for an excuse and unfortunately he made that clear to his wife. She still persisted until her father, who was still alive, my grandfather, said, "You are a very moral person, a very ethical person. Surely you know that your proper place is with your children, is with your husband." Apparently it was under his pressure that she decided to come back here in 1909.

Q: She had left the children behind?

KAISER: No, she brought them with her on the first visit. I'm not sure. That's a good question, and there is nobody around who could answer it. She had one child while she was here for a year. That was her sixth child. When she came back, she brought all of her children and settled in Brooklyn. That's where I began.

Q: Where did you rank in the children?

KAISER: I was the ninth of ten when.

Q: Did your father stay in the lumber business?

KAISER: No, he was a house builder, a contractor, and real estate. He prospered, particularly before World War I. He was wiped out by the real estate crash in 1927, I think. That's the one that we anticipated, the Wall Street crash when the Kennedy pair got out of the market. He wasn't poor for the 1929 crash. I remember, by the way, we lived in a nice middle class community in Brooklyn with private homes and so on. I remember fathers of good friends of mine jumping out of windows during the 1929 crash.

Q: Oh my God. You were born in 1913, so you're really too young to remember World War I ?

KAISER: I have one memory. It's very interesting. One of my older brothers was a World War I participant. He was in the Argonne, and a lot of his buddies were lost there. One of the very first things I remember is going with my mother to greet this brother when he returned from World War I: It would have been 1919.I was already five or six years old.

Q: How Jewish was your family? How about the nine children? I mean how Jewish how observant were you?

KAISER: I was brought up very observant. I broke away at the University of Wisconsin. I don't think I could have done it, I don't think I could have married Hannah if my mother were alive. She was not Jewish. She's a direct descendant of Governor Bradley. Incredible, remarkable.

Q: Well, I mean this is America.

KAISER: Her name was Greeley, there's another good American name, distantly related to Horace Greeley. My wife's first cousin, Dana, who was a wonderful guy, was head of the Unitarian Church. A great friend of Kennedy's, married Adlai Stevenson. Adlai was a Unitarian.

I went to a parochial school from six until I was 13. I went to a school, which taught Hebrew half a day and the regular curriculum the other half of the day. I was bilingual in Hebrew when I was 13 years old.

Q: What about Yiddish?

KAISER: Good question. My parents communicated in two languages. The main one was Yiddish, the other one was Russian, Ukrainian. When they didn't want the kids to understand, they talked in Ukrainian or Russian. My father picked up English in the community. My mother; I cannot remember my mother communicating with me a single English word. I have no recollection of any English communication between my mother and myself. I got snooty as soon as I learned Hebrew; I got very snooty about Yiddish because as a kid, Yiddish was the language of foreigners. I am very annoyed with myself. It's a wonderful language. I got enough so that it helped with my German. Yiddish is now a big subject at universities and colleges. It is a very rich language, basically from German, of the 1600s originally. It's a terrific language. My Yiddish is not what it should be.

Q: You went to a temple school?

KAISER: Well, no, it was separate. There was no temple connection. It was a school, built to attract students who were interested in Hebrew. The curriculum was tough. It was 8:00 to 12:00, four hours, in Hebrew and 1:00 to 5:00 was the legal curriculum for your regular studies.

Q: Brooklyn, one thinks: the kids all playing out in the streets. How about for you?

KAISER: There were playgrounds about a mile away or a little more, but we played a lot in the streets. Which reminds me: the ball would get lost in the hedges of one of the houses. One of us would go look for the ball and if it wasn't found within 30 seconds or 45 seconds, the rest of us spontaneously would yell out, "For heavens sake pick up the ball and look for it afterwards." This is very interesting. This phrase, as is apparent, stuck deeply in my mind. There were diplomatic situations where in fact that's how you resolved a dilemma. You picked up the ball and you looked for it afterwards (laughter).

Q: Were your friends, was your neighborhood basically a Jewish neighborhood?

KAISER: It was mainly Jewish. On my block it was about half-and-half. I remember the doctor (who by the way had an electric-driven car; we're talking about the early '20s), he was certainly not Jewish. There were others on the block who were not Jewish. I think it was predominantly Jewish.

Q: What kind of games did the kids play?

KAISER: We played punch ball with a rubber ball on the streets. Sometimes we played touch football. Of course the big thing was, we went to a summer camp for many years when my father was still prosperous. We played everything. I played tennis, I played baseball, I played basketball. There were tennis courts around at which I played and there was a golf course. We discarded the style of life when we moved north, but where I was born was two blocks from the golf course. I was born in what's called Dyker Heights. I was born on 86th Street, Bensonhurst, near the 59th Street ferry, the one that went between Staten Island and Manhattan. I remember the golf course. I caddied a little. In snowstorms it was the perfect place to go sleighing with all the hills.

Q: Oh yes, the bunkers. Up and over.

KAISER: Even when we moved up to 26th Street, it was a more middle class, whenever it snowed we'd rush back to the golf course.

Q: Well, you know, you're talking about the sports you were doing. This was very American and very unJewish, particularly for Orthodox families where they kept the kids at prayer.

KAISER: Well, that's the extreme. There are these kids. But, Jewish kids, you've got Sandy Koufax who was one of the greatest pitchers in the history of baseball. Are you familiar with the crisis he had to deal with?

Q: No.

KAISER: The World Series key game, I think it was the sixth game, fell on the Day of Atonement. He refused to, he did not. pitch on the Day of Atonement. Then there was Hank Greenberg who had 58 homers. Apparently the last few weeks of the season the pitchers went out of their way to walk him not to give him a chance to beat Babe Ruth's record. There's a wonderful movie, a documentary about him several years ago, absolutely superb.

Q: I'm thinking this is very American in a way because if you go back to the shtetl, there wasn't so much of this.

KAISER: Fiddler on the Roof, you remember one of the daughters runs away with a non-Jewish guy, a communist. So, there were, but very, very rare.

Q: Sports weren't part of a lot of groups, not just Jewish. Where did your family fit in politically?

KAISER: My father was actually Republican. It was always the association with Teddy Roosevelt and I think he might have been a member of whatever the committee was locally, it was Republican. The high point of that was the 1928 election, which I mentioned in my book, which has been given surprisingly little play by historians. I'm referring to the fact that Roosevelt in 1928 ran for governor against the first Jewish candidate for governor, Albert Ottinger, who was a very reputable guy, old German Jewish family. He was the only Republican state official. He was attorney general and Roosevelt ran for governor at the insistence of Al Smith who was the first Catholic candidate for president. Smith thought he was going to have a rough time, he wanted to carry New York and he realized that the only candidate who could offset Ottinger was Roosevelt. Of course the major objective on the part of the Republicans was to cut into the Jewish Democratic vote which was very substantial. On the first request, Roosevelt turned Smith down. He was at Warm Springs under the illusion that he could get the use of his legs back. He turned Smith down twice.

Somebody told Smith that the only person who could get him to do it was Eleanor. He asked Eleanor to do him a favor. Apparently, she called Franklin and she said to him, "Do you want to, is politics in your future?" "Oh yes, it's all I can live for." She said, "Well, you better run for governor." So, he agreed and he ran for governor and to offset Ottinger who picked Lehman as his running mate, as lieutenant governor. My father got very involved with this. He was delighted that Ottinger was the candidate. He was not for FDR. And he took me to a rally, an Ottinger rally. I was already 15 years old and it was a local elementary school. The audience was not quite half Jewish, but substantially Jewish, and Ottinger I remember it crystal clear, there was a great dichotomy between the original German Jews and the Russian Jews. He used a few Yiddish phrases to show that he was, although he was German.

I don't know whether you know what happened in 1928. Smith lost the state by a quarter of a million votes. I remember, my father and I, we stayed up all night. He bought a new electric radio that had just come out to hear the returns. We stayed up all night. It wasn't until mid morning when Ed Flynn (who, by the way, is a great unwritten American hero, but we'll come back to that) issued a phony, it was not true, said, "I'm swearing in a dozen deputy DASes or what has you who are going upstate to see why the returns have not yet been sent in," because they were trying to calculate how many votes they needed to beat Roosevelt. Well, that did the trick. Roosevelt carried New York State in 1928 with a majority of less than 1%. This, Stu, is how close the world came to never seeing or hearing of Franklin D. Roosevelt. And, running against a Jewish candidate! There was a leader in Brownsville, in what we called one of the most Jewishly populated districts. Hymie Shorenstein was the only Jewish district leader of all the Democratic Party. All the rest were Irish. He carried his district with a bigger majority for Roosevelt against a Jewish candidate than he'd ever gotten before for a Democrat. In fact, it elected FDR.

For example, the author of the wonderful biography of Walter Lippman, he's a professor out at UCLA. In his book, I knew him well, he says that FDR carried New York in a landslide. So I said to him, "Where do you get this information?" And I told him what I just told you. I said, "It's interesting, I had several Roosevelt historians read the manuscript and none of them caught my saying FDR carried New York with a majority of 1 percent." I remember the figure. It was in the early 20s, 22,000 or 23,000, in a vote of millions.

Q: Going back to the school, when you were studying Hebrew, was it strictly language?

KAISER: History, Bible, but not very religious. It was mainly the culture. And after a few years the classes were entirely in Hebrew, communication was in Hebrew.

Q: This was while you were in elementary school?KAISER: To high school. I went to a public high school.

Q: During elementary school, was Zionism much of a factor in those days?

KAISER: One of the highlights of my life was the leading Hebrew poet, a great, his name was Bialik, Hayyim Nahman Bialik, who wrote his most famous poem, it was after the Kishinev massacre, in which his message was, "you better stand up and fight against this." He had immigrated to Israel and on a trip to America he visited our school. I was picked to recite one of his poems. I still remember the opening line. So, we were very much, Palestine was an important factor in our education.

I remember another thing in my - interesting, I hadn't thought of this, it's amazing how the memory gets ignited.

Q: That's what oral history does.

KAISER: The day after Wilson died, we're talking about Woodrow Wilson. '23, '24? What was it?

Q: Yes, something like that.

KAISER: My Hebrew teacher came in very sad. He said, "The world has lost a great man. A man who really was dedicated to making a more peaceful universe." His very first words before he started the classwork.

Q: What about reading while you were in elementary school? What sort of books were you reading?

KAISER: I read mostly Horatio Alder, a very popular book. And then they had a whole series of books, heard of it? Third Base Thatcher, The Baseball Nine books. The title would be Left Guard, and then it would have a G name, or Right Wing, or Third Base. I read all those books, and all of the Horatio Alger books.

Q: Did you get into Tom Swift?

KAISER: Yes, a little bit into Tom Swift. I read some Hebrew books, too. I remember reading Ivanhoe. My Hebrew was that good that I could read Ivanhoe.

Q: By the time you went to you public high school this would have been about 1925?

KAISER: I was 13 years old, that's right.

Q: Where did you go to high school?

KAISER: I went to New Utrecht High School. At that time it was the biggest high school in New York City.

Q: How did the class fall out ethnically?

KAISER: It was quite mixed. There were Jewish kids. Then in the less prosperous part there were Italians. There was a Protestant mix. Was it predominantly Jewish? I would say close to 50% Jewish, but there were others, too.

Q: What courses particularly engaged you and what ones didn't engage you?

KAISER: I was a pretty good student. I did well. I was in the Arista, the honor society. History was one. When I graduated, I got a special mention for it as the leading student in history in the graduating class. I was good at language and very good at French and German, both of which were very useful later on. I was good in Math. I was one of the prize students, actually.

Q: What about extracurricular activities?

KAISER: I made the tennis team, but I dropped out when I had to play on Saturday. I knew my mother wouldn't allow that. I had several older brothers, but I had one named Oscar, quite an extraordinary guy, who came over to American when my mother came over. When he was 13 years old, they put him in the 4th grade elementary school. He didn't know a word of English. He graduated from the same high school five years later, with honors. He had never seen a baseball or football. He was a city all-scholastic football player. Played baseball, and was elected president of the school. I could go on and talk about him. I do in the book. He died unfortunately at 35. He had a great influence on me in where I went and what I did. He was very interested in bridging the gap between the Old World and the New World. He understood the problems very well.

Q: This reminds me of a question I should have asked earlier. How did your family end up with the name Kaiser?

KAISER: The original name was Chazis. A Russian name. When my grand uncle came to this country at Ellis Island, he mentioned that name as he checked in and the guy who checked him in said, "Nobody will recognize that name, why don't you call yourself Kaiser."

Q: Did that cause problems for the family during World War I?

KAISER: Very interesting. During the Spanish American War, I wasn't born yet, but the older brothers told me this story. There was a German American who had participated militarily in the Spanish American War. He lived a few houses away from the original house where I lived when I was a kid. The war broke out and he was being very badly treated by the local community. It was my mother who came to his protection and saw to it that nothing violent or disgraceful, I learned that from one of my brothers.

Q: You were going to high school during the '20s. You say your father was badly hurt in an automobile accident?

KAISER: In 1926 when he was about to undertake his major real estate project. He'd bought a golf course on Long Island with an apartment and was going to turn it into a community of individual homes and he was laid up for a long, long time.

Q: How did that affect the family?

KAISER: Quite traumatic actually. He became a cripple for the rest of his life. He had a broken leg, broken right up in here, a double break, and he was laid up for two years. And then had to learn how to walk again. He turned out to live to his early '80s.

Q: From the financial point of view did this bring you down?

KAISER: Yes. I was planning to go to Harvard. The prospects were very promising. I graduated in three and a half years. I was supposed to be devoting myself, the last half-year, to preparing for the college board exams which - SATS are child's play, to the college boards

Q: These were the Regents Exams.

KAISER: These were bigger than the Regents. These were the boards for out of New York State. New York was Regents. I did extremely well in the Regents. These were very tough exams. I had done very well in math. Never got less than 90 and a few hundreds in my final scores. I took four exams: French, English, history and math. I got to my puzzlement only in my upper 70s in history. The passing grade was 65. I got 70s in my French exam, a very tough exam. I got 55 in English, but, the exam is so tough, and the answers were so mediocre, that 55 was considered a passing grade. I flunked in math, 55. The Harvard Club took an interest in me in New York. I thought I was going to go to Harvard, but I didn't. They said, "Sorry, we can't take you." My second choice was Wisconsin.

Q: Why Wisconsin?

KAISER: That was the great, most liberal college in the country at that time. Had an enormous reputation, it had an experimental college, which I didn't enter, which was separate. They took me in. My second choice. Fortunately. It was the luckiest thing that ever happened to me.

Q: While you were in high school during the late '20s, did foreign affairs cross your radar at all?

KAISER: I was a fiendish sports fan. Brooklyn Dodgers and so forth. There was a local paper called the Eagle, I think, and it wasn't good enough for me. I heard about the New York Times. At that time the New York Times cost two cents and it had a very good sports section, as it does today. But I moved from sports and I began getting interested in world news. I became a big hit in current events club in high school. And, shame on me, my mother and father went back to visit their parents who were still alive, their fathers, in 1923. I had immersed myself in the politics of Europe. I read about all the terrible things that were going on.

Q: This is the great famine wasn't it?

KAISER: The Ukraine and the terrible things, in Germany, inflation.

Q: The place was falling apart.

KAISER: The postwar world war upheaval. Of course there was the Russian Revolution. I had gone to camp the summer before where I enjoyed myself enormously, where I first learned how to play tennis and we played all sorts of things and I wanted to go back. When they said, "We'd like to take you along." (They were taking two of the kids along, one sister and one brother), I said, "No, I'd rather not go." What I'd read in the newspaper about the, I must confess the idea of going into the turmoil and upheaval didn't particularly appeal to me. So I went back to the camp.

Q: Well, any teenage kid would do that.

KAISER: I'm very sorry now. My wonderful brother, when he got married, it was about a year or so later, he went back there on his honeymoon to visit where he had grown up as a kid. But I didn't go; I went to camp instead.

Q: You mentioned camp. Was this some Catskills type camp?

KAISER: It was an upper-middle class camp. It was very important, because it was a great outlet for sports and there was an intellectual quality to the camp we went to. Made famous by the facts that among the campers were Herman Wouk -

Q: He did the Caine Mutiny?

KAISER: And Moss Hart. Herman and I are friends to this day, quite close actually. Moss Hart took an interest in me and one of my brothers.

Q: Did he write Wish You Were Here?

KAISER: He wrote Once in a Lifetime. He wrote, Act I, in which he described, he was the social director of the camp that was set up for visiting parents who came to see their kids. He used to do his show every weekend.

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I went up to see him and he thought it was a tremendous idea. He said, "I'll give you, I'm practically broke, but I'll give you $100 for your tuition and another $100 to get you started, and then you're on your own." I came down and told my mother that he was all for it, but she, honorable woman that she was, said to me, "If your father says it's okay, okay, you can go." It was the depths of the Depression.

Q: Describe how the University of Wisconsin appeared to you when you first arrived there in 1930.

KAISER: The first thing I remember was political. This was arriving late September and there was going to be a primary. In those days in Wisconsin, there was only one party; the Republican Party, and the real conflict politically took place between the progressives fathered by LaFollette and the stalwarts, who were the conservative Republicans. There were all kinds of signs: "Kohler, Kohler, Kohler." I asked who was running against Kohler? Philip LaFollette, the youngest son of Bob LaFollette, age 31, was running for governor. I didn't see any signs for him. He won the election. He became governor, at 31. The father is another story. He was the most promising guy he could possibly be politically and he screwed it all up later on, but that's another story.

Q: When you arrived there, first place, how did you get set up? You pay your tuition, you've got to find a place to live and I suppose you've got to find some work to do.

KAISER: I met on the train a guy coming out who knew one of my brothers and we roomed together. My share of the room was $2.00 a week. It was in a house, a rather nice house right off the campus from the main building of the campus. And I got to work as a Hebrew teacher.

Q: Who were you teaching? Was it college or religious school?

KAISER: Elementary Hebrew. It was part of a classroom, it was the conservative synagogue. I taught Hebrew. What the hell did they pay me? No more than $10 or $15 a week, but that was enough to live on.

Q: Your school before was Orthodox. Was this a different world for you?

KAISER: There was a Hillel foundation where I spent a lot of time. You know, that's where Jewish students congregate. And I found a private Jewish house where a woman was keeping sort of a restaurant, so to speak, in the house for kids who wanted to eat kosher, so I could have a kosher meal every once in a while. But the meals at the union students' union - which was a marvelous, the first university I think in America to build a modern students' union - there was the Ratskeller, the dining room, and you could have a sandwich and a malted milk for about 20 cents. The malted milk was so thick that you had to use an ice cream spoon to eat it.

Q: Yes, I remember the kind, you couldn't use a straw. It clogged up immediately.

KAISER: Remember this is at Wisconsin. It's the great dairy state. Later on, the breakfast at the union was eight cents, toast and coffee, and lunch was a fixed price of 25 cents and dinner 35 cents. Breakfast, Stu, when you were really broke, you could have all the coffee you wanted to drink, so we'd bring along another guy and you'd have your coffee and he'd go take the cup and at least he'd have coffee.

Q: I would imagine at that point the effects of the Depression were hitting the university, too.

KAISER: Yes, we had the New Deal. After '33 we all had jobs - with Aubrey Williams whom I later got to know - the National Youth Administration. We all had jobs with the government, at the university library, I don't remember the details.

Q: How did you find classes at Wisconsin? One always thinks of Wisconsin as being this great liberal institution. Was that apparent when you got there?

KAISER: Well, the student body was split. There were some terrible incidents. When I was there, one of the things that made it liberal was the experimental college, which was separate, which was run by Alexander Meiklejohn, the president of Amherst. He was removed in a famous incident involving Calvin Coolidge. The board pushed him out. He was too liberal. He supported trade unions. Clinton Frank, who was the newly appointed president, presumably a liberal guy but turned out not to be so liberal, this was the big liberal thing he did. He hired Meiklejohn to set up the school. It was a two-year deal where you spent the first year on Greek civilization, the second on American and then you became a junior in the regular college.

Q: It sounds a little bit like Chicago and Hutchins.

KAISER: Somewhat like that.

Q: That was the era when they started that going back to basics, you might say.

KAISER: I didn't go. I was the last student who was the last eligible to go and decided not to go. Although I loved it, the faculty then became part of Wisconsin, the regular faculty, and I studied with a couple of teachers who were brought there by Meiklejohn. We later became great friends. He was a great friend of my father-in-law's.

Q: When you went there did you have a goal in mind, was there a major or did you see yourself doing something?

KAISER: Yes. I had been greatly influenced by a counselor at camp. The counselors at camp were a very creamy lot. They were mostly from Harvard and Columbia. A large number of lawyers and they became judges and so on. One of these guys had a great influence on me and he was my counselor. He was a brilliant student at Harvard, Phi Beta Kappa, etc., and he had a major influence. I dreamed of becoming someday a philosophy professor and I took that very seriously and got involved in classics. I had to learn Latin in high school and we had to learn Greek at Wisconsin.

Q: Looking back on it, here was this Midwestern university, dairy farmers, beer makers, mainly German, Norwegian stock. How did this liberalism develop there?

KAISER: Well, LaFollette. LaFollette was the great liberal. I give some of that in the book.

Q: You might mention the name of the book.

KAISER: The book is called Journeying Far and Wide: A Political and Diplomatic Memoir.

Q: When was it published?

KAISER: 1992. Two guys had a great influence: LaFollette in the early 20th century when he became senator, and a guy called Van Hise, I think he was a geologist, who became president of the university. They established a very close liaison. They were both really liberal, and they developed a close relationship between the university and the state government. The university under the influence of LaFollette and Van Hise, the liberal president. LaFollette became governor of the state in his early career and then of course senator, and Van Hise were very close, and the university was developing social ideas: how to deal with unemployment, how to deal with all kinds of social issues. And then Van Hise would incorporate these problems into the curriculum of the university. So there was this continual interchange between the university and the state government. The New Deal, Stu, was essentially, its great ideas came part from Roosevelt's governorship of New York, and part from Wisconsin. For example, the whole social security system was developed and established by a faculty member, a brilliant student at the University of Wisconsin. Witte was his name, a student of Wilbur Cohen, who later on ended up his career as a member of LBJ's cabinet as the head of Health, Education and Welfare.

Q: During 1932 you were already at the university. Did you get involved in the campaign?

KAISER: We were all for FDR very actively. And, I heard Herbert Hoover give his last campaign speech. He was going back to California the weekend before the election, the Friday before Tuesday. There was a substantial turnout in the field house, which handled thousands. They had installed a loud speaker system. I sat way in the back. He was introduced by the governor who, by the way, was later defeated by young Phil LaFollette. His name was Kohler. He introduced Hoover by saying, "The man who fed the starving Belgians and Russians." It was the best he could say for him. He didn't say, "who fed the Stalinists."

Q: Yes, well, Hoover had set up relief things during World War me and also after in the Ukraine.

KAISER: He began to talk, but in spite of the loud speaker you couldn't hear him. He was a beaten man. It was as clear as could be. And we in the back yelled, "Louder," because we couldn't hear him. It was a very sad performance.

Q: Did you find, as always there is on a campus and particularly I would say Wisconsin, was there a radical, sort of an embryonic communist?

KAISER: There was a left wing society and then there was a LID society, the league for industrial democracy, which is where I associated. It was very big. The campus was divided between the so-called fraternity types and the independents.

Q: What about the fraternities? Did they represent sort of a right wing group at that time?

KAISER: They were the athletes, the ones who, the W's, the ones who played football and basketball and baseball. They were all on the right wing. There was a terrible incident when they beat up people, not communists, it was the LID meeting. A terrible experience. They threw people into the lake and there was a big protest meeting two days later, where Glen Frank, the president gave a milquetoast speech. We were all let down until the dean, who was a conservative politically, but a radical in terms of civil rights, gave a fiery speech condemning the athletes who were guys who picked up people at the meeting and threw them into the lake. One of the great events of the years I was there.

Q: Today is the 18th of May 2005. Let's talk a bit about Wisconsin. You were there from when to when?

KAISER: I was out one year and I got there in 1930 and I left in '35.

Q: Did you feel that the campus was a ferment of politics at the time? This was just the beginning of the Depression, Hoover was president, things were not going well. What were the students up to?

KAISER: I told you the big event, the most dramatic event, was when the League for Industrial Involvement, I LID, a kind of liberal or social democratic, but liberal, not left wing, not communist in any shape, matter or form, was holding a big meeting at whicl still remember the guy's namMonroe Sweetland, a well-known character, came from Oregon I think, was the speaker. A group of athletes, guys who had the W's, came in, broke up the meeting, and threw Sweetland into the lake. This became a major issue. The president of the university was agreeable to a big meeting. Launched a protest, and vigorously protested, as meaningful a protest as possible. It was a big turnout at the biggest hall they had at that time. The president spoke and gave a very tepid speech. He talked about the principles of freedom of speech and made little if any, very slight, reference to the actual event itself. The students who were there were looking forward to raw meat. There were really passionate sentiments about this terrible event. The next man to get up and speak was the dean of the college who was a Republican, professor of history, medieval history of all things. His name was Sellery. And he gave an absolutely passionate speech which, none of these generalizations, but referring explicitly to the terrible behavior of these students, and how they had shamed the W on their sweaters. That's what carried the day. It was probably the most political campus in America. That's not to say that necessarily a majority of the students were politically engaged, but a large number of them were. They were in a minority. Fraternity row and sorority row were more or less the dominant atmosphere of the campus. But I repeat, the minority was quite considerable, and certainly legitimately earned the reputation of beinwhen you take into account the faculty particularlthe most liberal university in America.

Q: Labor at that time was in great ferment and was coming to the fore. Was that apparent? Were there labor organizers, labor connections on the campus at the time?

KAISER: No, you mean among the teachers?

Q: Yes, or at least people talking about labor?

KAISER: Oh, yes. You asked a very good question. The University of Wisconsin was a place where the study of labor. its history, its institutional behavior, etc., was a major part of the university faculty. Again, the University of Wisconsin was famous for its teachings of and writings about labor in America. The leading economists were John R. Collins who was a famous economist who launched the serious study of labor, and Selig Perlman who was a teacher with whom I had very significant connections. They taught labor courses and they wrote definitive histories of labor in the United States. There was a precursor of McCarthy named John Chaplain who came from I think the area McCarthy came from, and he launched a one-man public campaign talking about the communists on the University of Wisconsin faculty. He designated some including Perlman, which was ridiculous. There was a hard core of communist students. They hated Perlman because he made monkeys out of them. Some of them were his students and nobody was more devastating in his criticism and more sophisticated in his criticism of communism than Selig Perlman. The study of labor was one of the great strengths of the University of Wisconsin.

Q: While you were there as a young man were you getting an idea of the enormity of the evil, I don't know what other term to use, that was going on in the Soviet Union? Because you know in some places people were coming back rosy-eyed about the Soviet Union. What were you getting?

KAISER: I was getting Selig Perlman who was originally Russian, who was a very sophisticated critic of what was going on in the Soviet Union. In a labor context, you see you've got to remember that the communist doctrine believes the forefront of the revolution would be the labor forces, the trade unions. He was a brilliant and devastating and very sophisticated in underlining the phoniness of that argument.

Q: Well, you took a year out when you were there. What did you do?

KAISER: I caught my breath. I did a lot of reading. I did some tutoring and cultivated and enjoyed friendships, continued the romance that I had with a beautiful young lady at the time. I wouldn't say it was brilliantly spent, but it wasn't ill spent.

Q: I was going to say it sounded well spent to me. One has these times when you can have, the Italians call them parentheses. Reading and enjoying companionship, pursuing a young lady and all. I can't think of a better way to spend a year.

KAISER: One of my sons when he first learned about it, I guess he was a student at Harvard, he said, "What? You took a year off from college?" That was the time when it began to become a craze to take a year off.

Q: While you were there the Depression was really hitting. How did that affect you and the campus?

KAISER: It didn't affect me. I lived very modestly on about $10 or $12 a week. I ate modestly and there was very little opportunity financially for self-indulgence. I imposed on myself, this is a key thing, really, a very strict regime. I went to bed early. I got up at 6:00 in the morning. I did a couple hours of study before breakfast. When we finally got an apartment, my two brothers and I, we cooked all the food ourselves, but before then I would go to the student union and get breakfast for eight cents. Prunes, toast and coffee. I would organize my courses so that they were all held in the morning, from 8:00 to noon. I then had a good friend. We would go to the gym and play handball. We would do this was practically every day of the week, or at least three days out of the week. After that I would have lunch at the union, it would be a sandwich and a milkshake. Then study until 5:30 or 6:00 and evenings, I never did any studying in the evenings. Not even before exams. I followed a very rigorous regime. Apparently it served me very well.

Q: The election of Roosevelt in 1932, did that engage you and your friends?

KAISER: We were really, it was a great event. We were very enthusiastic, and then it became, practically, a very helpful event because the National Youth Authority headed up by Audrey Williams provided us jobs. As students we were able to earn some money. Students working in some of those programs that he established. Research of some kind. Research on projects that they were working on. You are really testing my memory. Go ahead.

Q: That's the whole idea of this. On the campus until you graduated in '35, there were two other movements going more or less. One was the communists. How did you find those students? Were they out there working?

KAISER: They were aggressive. There was an outfit, what was it called, which was communist controlled. But they were a modest minority, they were really a small minority. But they were loud and articulate, but the liberal contingent was much more significant, no comparison.

Q: How about these pseudo fascist movements, like the Silver Shirts or Pelly's outfit? Were any of these out there?

KAISER: The only thing we had was individuals like John Chapple who were really attacking liberalism in the university.

Q: But there wasn't any sort of embryonic (because you had a German community) national socialism?

KAISER: The young LaFollette, when he was governor, visited Nazi-Germany. Remember, Wisconsin was predominantly children of German immigrants.

Q: Oh, yes, both my grandfather and great grandfather were German and they were in the civil war.

KAISER: That's right. They were the one state with an authentic majority in favor of the civil war. So, you're familiar with that.

He came back. He didn't say; what he did say was, and I want to be very careful here, he did indicate that they had created, the Nazis, succeeded in creating passionate support for their ideas. He didn't approve of the ideas, but he did what I've just said. He hoped that the new Progressive Party could generate the same enthusiasm for its program and activities. And, he more than suggested, he established and created a new symbol that represented the new Progressive Party. He took that from the swastika idea. Professor Perlman in his brilliant and he was brilliant, he described the symbol to LaFollette, the governor, and made it the party's symbol. He described it as a circumcised swastika, which made a big impact on the campus. Remember that in World War I Wisconsin was pretty passionate against the war. Old man LaFollette was one of the "11 willful men."

Q: That was not that popular a war. Well, now, as you were moving up to 1935 and graduating, what were you looking at, pointing towards?

KAISER: I was pointing towards a Rhodes Scholarship.

Q: A Rhodes Scholarship is extremely competitive and you can point towards it, but you've got to have something else in mind.

KAISER: I think the other thing would have been teaching. Getting a Ph.D. and teaching.

Q: What was the process of getting a Rhodes Scholarship at that time?

KAISER: The same as it is today I think. You had to fill out a very detailed application. You needed references and support from five teachers who wrote in for you. Then you appear before a committee of the faculty who picked, as many as they wanted, candidates to appear before a state committee. The process of getting a scholarship was the university, state committee and then the regional committee, there were eight regions in America. Each region produced four Rhodes Scholars, so you had to get through the university, the state and then the region.

Q: Well, then, you were successful?

KAISER: Well, what happened was very interesting. As my mother used to say, the most important thing to have in life is luck, more important than anything else. How right she was. Normally the university picked four or five people. In my case it picked only two. One of the professors who was most interested in my getting the scholarship gave me a little bit of the background. What I know transpired was, that dean who had made the great speech was the chairman of the committee and they picked two of us. Because I by chance made a big hit on him. He heckled me badly during the interview, and he heckled me. He said to me, "How come your interest is in philosophy, and you took no science courses? How can you take philosophy without science courses? I said I thought that was feasible. Yes, philosophy students take science courses, but that's not always the case.

I said to him, "Dean, I have a close friend, in fact he's had a great influence on my life, who studied philosophy at Harvard and was magna cum laude and Phi Beta Kappa. I received a letter from him a week or so ago, some of which was true, "telling me that he was on a cruise," he was now a lawyer, "and also on the cruise was Albert Einstein. I got to talking with him one morning, and he was curious about my background, and when I told him that I was a student at Harvard and majored in philosophy, he said, 'Did you study Abner Whitehead?' I said yes, I did study under Whitehead. He said, 'Well, that's great.' He said, 'Maybe you can explain to me what Whitehead was all about. I've never been able to understand it.'" And I got up and left. I walked out of the meeting before I was dismissed. It turned out that the dean just loved it. He thought it was absolutely magnificent that I would stand up to them. He then and there decided, "We should get this guy a scholarship." So, instead of four or five, they produced only two.

Then it went to the state level where there was a notoriously right wing committee. The committees were always made up of four Rhode Scholars and one distinguished chairman, not a Rhodes Scholar. The chairman was a federal judge, a notorious right wing judge, and I knew it. That's why they picked only two guys. I got through the state committee, and no need to bore you with all the details, but it was approved by the state committee and the regional committee of Chicago. There was one committee member who was a roving member. He would sit on all of the committees of that region, which were four, and he was a liberal Protestant minister from the New England Church of Chicago. Apparently he became a great supporter of my application. He also sat on the regional committee. I was apparently the first guy picked in Chicago.

Q: You went to Oxford and you were there from when to when?

KAISER: '36 to '39.

Q: When you went there did you have a goal in mind of what you were going to get out of it?

KAISER: Mainly, at the time, to teach. But I got increasingly more involved and I changed my course. I got involved in the idea of government, getting directly engaged in public affairs. I found myself in the middle of by great luck; the college that was really the most famous of Oxford colleges: Balliol College, the most political, by far the most political.

Q: Was this by chance? Which college you were assigned to?

KAISER: A very good question. The procedure was, you had to be picked by a college. If you won a scholarship, you listed eight colleges in case the first seven turned you down. You had no say and the Rhodes people had no say. The colleges made the choice.

The most prestigious college was Balliol. I was pushed most vigorously by my professor of classics. He was my most ardent supporter for the scholarship. His college was Corpus Christi, small, not particularly political. I met, in the months before I got the Rhodes Scholarship, a fellow from Balliol College named John Fulton who was in Wisconsin on a Rockefeller program (Rockefeller had a program for foreigners) studying the fame of Wisconsin's history of relations between government and university. He later founded Sussex University and used Wisconsin as his model. We became good friends. He said to me, "I understand you're applying for a scholarship?" "Yes." He said, "If you get it, be sure and put Balliol down first." I told him my problem; I had to put Corpus first. I put Balliol second. The year before, a student was elected as a Rhodes Scholar sponsored by the same guy who was sponsoring me. He went to Corpus and he was very unhappy there. He was unhappy there and they were unhappy with him. So they turned me down. Fulton did write a letter. Although 13 of the Rhodes Scholars my year, picked Balliol as their first choice., they picked only three of us. The other two became very famous in their respective fields: one was Walt Rostow; the other was Gordon Craig who was a leading German historian, recognized as such in Germany as well as the United States. And, the number one diplomatic historian. So I was fortunately, very luckily, picked by Balliol.

Q: You say that the college was very political. What were the overriding political interests? You got there in '36?

KAISER: The atmosphere was pulsating. It was the Spanish Civil War. It was the rise of Hitler. You couldn't have a more exciting political atmosphere.

Q: Had the king abdicated by this point?

KAISER: The king abdicated just before Christmas 1936. Wait a minute, was it '36 or '37?

Q: I just can't remember, but he abdicated while you were on the campus?

KAISER: Oh yes.

Q: This must have been a major interest.

KAISER: Oh, it was a major thing, but sort of a different kind of interest than the big issues.

What I'm laughing about - in all the Oxford colleges there were junior common rooms, which were the rooms for coffee, for relaxation. This was a student domain, the common room, and every year they would elect a president. One year I was elected president, the only American ever in Balliol history up to that time (I don't know what's happened since). And I recall I made this comment before I was elected, Time Magazine had edited out in London the references to the love affair of Edward VIII. However, if you subscribed directly to America, you got the full story. We would vote in the common room about the magazines we wanted to subscribe to. In any case, I told the students. There was a unanimous vote to change the subscription from London to New York and to have an extra copy, two subscriptions rather than one. It was a big issue, but nothing compared to Spain.

Q: The Spanish Civil War was going. How did that play on you and at the college?

KAISER: People were interested in politics, people were liberal. They were very engaged in what was going on. There were a lot of students, not students, who were fighting on the loyalist side to enhance that interest and concern. It was on the front page all the time. That, and Hitler, my God. What more can you ask for a significant political atmosphere?

Q: What about the Oxford movement, "We shall not fight for king or country?"

KAISER: That was long before. That was essentially a United Nations vote, a League of Nations vote. Britain had been very strongly in favor of the league and the issue was would you fight for king and country under any circumstances. The vote against that was really a vote for the League of Nations. The idea was, you went to war as the war was justified by a League of Nations vote. That was before my time.

Q: Well, at your time, were the young men joining the RAF reserves or the territorials or anything? Was it equivalent to an ROTC movement? How about you?

KAISER: I didn't pay dues to any of the clubs.

Q: You were an American. You could sort of duck, in a way.

KAISER: Well that's right.

Q: What was your impression of your preparation for the Oxford life as contrasted to the others who were there, I mean the native born?

KAISER: We were more mature, and they recognized it. They looked up to us. We were three or four years older. We had a previous college degree. You had to handle that, but if you handled that correctly they appreciated it. Obviously, with all due to modesty, I must have treated them correctly because they elected me president of the junior common room. I didn't campaign for it. A couple of students came to me and said, "Would you be interested?" Why not?

Q: What studies were you taking then?

KAISER: I was taking modern studies, politics, philosophy and economics.

Q: Were you feeling influence of the Fabian socialists, the London School of Economics approach to things?

KAISER: I was peddling the Wisconsin progressivism to the British students. I was interested in the sort of leftist center, but basically I was what you would call, I suppose, a dirty word, a Social Democrat. I have been studying that relation to more conservative and the relation to more leftist, the left wingers. I am proud of the fact that I have friends who went either way. I was on the straight and not so narrow path, but on a straight path.

Q: Well, in a way it was also very American. I mean the Americans never really subscribed to the government taking over business and all that. I think we've always looked upon this as being not very effective. The American approach is different.

KAISER: We had an alternative. We had Roosevelt's New Deal which was a very special, very unique and very democratic with a small 'd' as well as a big 'D'. I was a passionate New Dealer. I remember we used to have at the end of every term, which was only eight weeks, and then you had six weeks vacation. The first term I wrote an essay for one of my tutors. I was doing British political history and he asked me to write an essay about the reform act of 1832. And I remember, I opened up by analogizing to the New Deal. Well, he thought it was a little far fetched. I said, "reform in order to survive." I remember when we appeared before the master of the college and the students as sort of a send off on their vacation, the master referred to it. He was a social democrat, the first one in Oxford history. He made some reference to me and the New Deal, with a smile, friendly and so on.

Q: Well, how about something that I think for an American is a little difficult to adjust to: that is, the class structure in England. I imagine it was reflected at Oxford ?

KAISER: Oxford was an elitist place. No question about that. But they had scholarship kids, quite a few. Balliol was the most cosmopolitan of all the colleges as well as being the most political. I don't know the original phrasing of this, but there were more I think scholarship kids at Balliol than any other college. Kids came from Scotland, which was a good influence, and from all over, and foreigners. The first college to take Indians, not blacks. The fact was, the scholarship kids did so much to democratize the college as they were aristocratized by the college. It became the other way around. It was a very wonderfully communal atmosphere at Balliol. The most prosaic, but significant, example I can give is if suddenly you want to go to London and you had to go to London and you didn't have the cash to buy a ticket, you would stop without hesitation the first college mate you ran into whether you had any personal relationships with him or not. You would unhesitatingly ask if he could lend you the money to go to London. That was very prosaic, but a meaningful way of expressing the general atmosphere.

Q: What about what was happening in Germany? Were you able, were your people able, to get over there and take a look at this? Did you go?

KAISER: I did. I spent a week in Munich on my summer vacation. I think I mentioned that already. to help my classmate, my college, my Rhodes Scholar classmate, buy a Leica camera illegally.

Q: How were people looking at Germany, were you looking at it?

KAISER: It was mixed. It was a big issue, a big international issue on the British political scene. The first time I heard Churchill speak was shortly after I arrived, and he made a speech at the Oxford union. He was then out of government, he was in Parliament. He said, in order to resist Nazism, we had to make an alliance with the Soviet Union. Which is what happened just by the force of events, rather than by the orderly signing of an agreement, when Hitler invaded the Soviet Union.

Q: He later talked about he would make due obeisance to the devil if it advanced his cause.

KAISER: In Balliol we were very political, we were very conscious of what was going on. We did not approve of Chamberlain's policy and then we got involved in the famous by election. We were appalled by Munich and we got involved in the famous by election after Munich which was, the first one was held in Oxford.

Q: What was the by election? This was 1939. What happened?

KAISER: It was a month after Munich. The issue was appeasement. The anti-appeasement candidate turned out to be the master of Balliol, the first time he had gotten involved in politics. It was a united front. He was a labor party guy and the other guy was an Oxford guy named Clinton Hobb who later became a member of the British government. This was 1939 and it was a very active election and all of us were involved, certainly all of Balliol. because he came down to speak to us about his running, explaining it was something he had to do. I ought to show you the film that was made about it; I have a copy of it. He asked for indulgence on the part of the students. We had an agreement. The senior common room was where the fellows were, and the junior common room. The master of the college could not appear before the students without the approval of the president of the junior common room. Most of us at Balliol were heavily engaged in the election. All the lowers were canvassing for Lindsay. That was completely illegal. Nobody bothered, the British thought it was very charming.

Q: Did you find yourself attracted to the British labor movement at the time?

KAISER: The British labor movement was the movement that was opposing, most of them were, opposing Hitler and opposing the policy of appeasement. The liberals were okay, but they weren't, as is the case today, they weren't consequential. The real division was between conservatives and labor. Labor was a social democratic party. There were more leftist people there. Some communists in the labor party. There was no formal, there were no student communists.

Q: How about the British fascists, Moseley?

KAISER: I don't think they had; they had a big rally before my time, which ended up in a riot, but I don't think they were of very great consequence.

Q: We're basically up to 1939. Your time at Oxford. When did you leave Oxford?

KAISER: Just before the war.

Q: We'll pick this up just before the war, and you might mention some of the personalities, your judgment about who were you with.

KAISER: More than one half of Wilson's cabinet - that's why they sent me to London - I knew from Oxford days.

Q: This was Prime Minister Wilson?

KAISER: I knew him, I met him at Oxford. More than half of the cabinet were friends of mine at Oxford.

Q: Okay, well, we'll pick it up then.

Today is the 3rd of June, 2005. What connection did you have with the Kennedys?

KAISER: Interesting, I got to know Kennedy through Byron White.

Q: Whizzer White? He was a football player, later a justice.

KAISER: He was a brilliant student by the way as well as a brilliant athlete, and we met in Oxford. As a matter of fact, my first year was his brother's last year. His brother was a Rhodes Scholar, too, Sam, who became a brilliant doctor. One of the pioneers of aviation medicine. My last year was Byron's first year and we hit it off very soon. Instead of coming to Oxford on schedule, he would have been in the fall of 1938, he got this contract, the biggest contract ever given to a football player, by the Pittsburgh team. Do you know what the biggest contract was? $15,000. That was the biggest contract, 1938. He came late. The British didn't like it at all, being professional instead of coming to Oxford. Ironically it happened that just as he arrived that corny movie called The Yank at Oxford, I don't know if you're old enough to remember it?

Q: Yes, with Robert Taylor.

KAISER: Robert Taylor. It had just come out. So, Byron practically went into hiding. There was tremendous publicity when he arrived in all the papers. I became sort of a big brother. I don't know how it happened. I got to know him in just that little stage and we became good friends. I remember he told me that wonderful story of how some American Rhode Scholars had been football players who had become rugby players on their college teams, not the university team. He told me the first contact he had with a British student was when a shy little British student came into his room shortly after he arrived, just to tell him that he was ineligible to play on the college rugby team because he was a professional. That was his greeting. That was his welcoming to Oxford.

Well, in any case, we became good friends and he had never played squash. I was a pretty good squash player. I played for my college team. He wanted to learn how to play squash, so I taught him how to play squash. Within six months he was beating the pants off me. He was an absolutely extraordinary athlete Not only football; basketball, baseball, the works. Well, we became good friends, and when we all returned to America he went to law school at Yale, always head of his class by the way, and then came here as a law clerk to Chief Justice Vincent. So, we saw each other.

He always said he wasn't going to get involved in politics. Well, when he got through with his clerkship, he went off to Colorado to practice law. Then he got involved with the Kennedy campaign because he had helped save Kennedy's life in that wartime accident. He wrote the report on what had transpired in that event. When Kennedy got nominated he appointed Byron as head of Citizens for Kennedy, separate from the regular campaign machinery. By that time I was back here teaching and I had had quite a bit of experience politically particularly in New York, which was very important. So shortly after his appointment, he called me, Byron; as a matter of fact, I called him to congratulate him. I was a little hesitant, might as well get it on the record. My eldest son, who became a big shot on the Washington Post, he was then about 13 or 14 years old. "Why don't you call your friend and congratulate him?" So I did, and Byron was very receptive, was very pleased. He was a shy person basically, quite a shy guy. He used to disappear after every football game, he would disappear because he didn't want anybody to make a fuss. Nobody could find him. So I called and he said, "Oh, I'm delighted you called. I'm coming in tomorrow; will you meet me for breakfast?" So I did and I talked to him about New York State politics, which I knew extremely well at the time.

Q: This is 1960?

KAISER: 1960. And he said, "Will you come to work with the campaign?" I said, " I'd be glad to." That's how I got involved and went up to New England on a holiday with the family when I got a phone call saying "Will you join the campaign flight from Boston?" The president wasn't on it, but the brother, the campaign manager, Bobby, was on it. "We'd like for you to come along." I said I'd be delighted. Then on the plane I was introduced to Bobby. I'd never met him before. He knew my brother who was a trade union lawyer. He called my brother "the only Goddamn honest lawyer in the trade union" that he ever met, something like that. My brother didn't like it. It was a compliment and it was true; he was the most honorable man I ever knew. This was the brother just older than I. He was really Mr. Integrity.

One or two incidents on the flight. He asked me about New York politics and I gave him several pieces of advice. I said, "There are three elements in the Democratic Party. Don't try to bring them together. You have to deal with each one separately. They hardly talk to each other." So he took that advice; it was very sound advice, actually.

Q: What were the three elements?

KAISER: There was the party, which was Carmine de Sapio. There were two separate wings in the labor movement, which was very powerful, that weren't talking to each other. Then, interesting, I had mentioned the fact that Papa's anti-Semitism might be a bit of a problem for the candidate. Byron said to me, "Why don't you talk to Bobby about it?" I did. I sat down next to him, this is all on the airplane, sat down next to him and I remember, he was a hard-nosed character. We'll come back to him as a leader, it was very interesting. He was the head of the campaign. He recognized it. "What can we do about it?" "Well," I said, "is there anything in his record that would help? " He said, "Yes, he belonged to the Jewish golf club in Palm Beach." They had a place in Palm Beach. "He's the only non-Jew who belongs to that club." Maybe one or two other trivial things that I don't recall. Then they asked me to come out and campaign, and be one of Bobby's deputies, which I was cleared to do. I was done teaching at the American University and I could, several days a week I was free, and so I became an active participant in the campaign. We covered Illinois, Michigan, Ohio, but mostly Illinois and Michigan, the citizens. On my free time I would go to headquarters here. Bobby ran it all. Bobby ran this. I had been in other campaigns. The Truman campaign, the Stevenson campaign when I was assistant secretary of labor. I made speeches for Stevenson on the West Coast mainly. I noticed the confusion, the jealousies, the lack of clear authority. All of this was taken care of Bobby. Nobody challenged who was running the campaign. Bobby was the boss, and all of that characteristics infighting, jealousy didn't exist. He ran the whole thing and he ran it very well, by the way. I got to know him. I got to know Bobby quite well.

Q: Well, I'd like to go all the way back to 1938. Did you have any contact with Joseph Kennedy who was ambassador?

KAISER: The ambassador came to speak at the United States club at Oxford which was made up of Americans at Oxford, primarily Rhodes Scholars and a few odds and ends and residents. About 75 Rhode Scholars, 32 a year, three years, some stayed for only two years. The old man foolishly came unprepared and said, "I have no text, no speech to make. If you have any questions, ask me a question." Well, most of the Rhodes Scholars were New Dealers, and we bloodied him. It was a foolish thing for him to do. He threw one fast ball or curve after another. They were a bunch of pretty bright young characters. He just couldn't cope and he was getting more and more angry until our faculty advisor, D. W. Brogan, who was the great Americanist

Q: I've read some of his books.

KAISER: An amazing character. There was nothing about America he didn't know. Plus every goddamned personality you could possibly imagine. He wrote some very good books. And in order to save the ambassador, he was bloodied enough, he called the meeting to an end and that was it. I met his daughter who came down with a boyfriend once to the dance at the end of the year, what they called the commencement ball, just for a couple of hours in the evening. She was very conservative. She was pro-Franco as I recall which was very conservative. The old man, I don't know if I mentioned this to you, got himself to the rear of the eight ball. How do I mean by that? He was anti-war; he was an appeaser. He sponsored Lindberg when Lindberg came. After Lindberg visited Germany, he came through London. He took him around and Lindberg was peddling the line, the powerful Luftwaffe. The Nazis had done a great job on giving him the treatment and he came to London full of the power of the Luftwaffe. They decorated him as I recall. London would be destroyed within 48 hours later when war was declared, and so on. Well, Kennedy was against the war. He was not very pro-British. He didn't like the idea of our getting involved in the war again.

Q: Well, he was carrying some of the Boston Irish animosity towards the British anyway from the old country.

KAISER: You just took the words out of my mouth. Now, here was this imminent war, see. Even after the war broke out. He understood it was likely that we would be eventually involved. The only way to prevent that, which he wanted to do to the extent that he could, was for the war to end quickly. And the only way the war could end quickly was if the Germans won quickly. So he slid into what I call the Kennedy syndrome; he became, in effect, pro-German. You see that sequence? He became an appeaser. And what was that group in America against the war?

Q: America First.

KAISER: America First. A lot of respectable people. Kingman Brewster, for example. A lot of very reputable people.

Q: When you left there in 1939, where did you go?

KAISER: I went to work at the Federal Reserve Board. I'd rather not talk about that. It was not a happy period for me. I ended up in, I was deferred, and I ended up in the State Department at the end of the war.

Q: What were you doing?

KAISER: I was briefly in the unit which dealt with UN affairs and specialized agencies: UNESCO, the ILO and so on. Truman recognized the importance of labor, trade unions in Europe, and the reconstruction of Europe, and it attracted the unions were under severe communist pressure, indeed the dominant unions in Italy and in France were communist controlled. He asked congress to establish an assistant secretary of labor in charge of international affairs, and congress did so, and he signed it.. The first guy to get the job was David Morse who had long experience in labor agencies in the government. The National Labor Relations Board was one of them. He had served in the army as labor advisor at the end of the war, as the war ended. He was consumed with interest in this subject and this problem. He was a very attractive character, personality-wise, bright and very liked and very respected. There was a big fight for his confirmation. The way-out right-wing people headed by Jay Lovestone, I don't know if you know that name.

Q: Jay Lovestone, for many years was a power in the AFL-CIO.

KAISER: And basically a bad influence. He wrecked the careers of quite a few people by saying they were soft on communism.

Q: He was a former communist wasn't he? He was one of these guys who became more holy than the Pope when he switched sides.

KAISER: And how. If you want to, we can talk about Jay. Interesting guy, very close to the Committee on Un-American Affairs. Luckily, I was able to deal with him because he worked for David Dubinsky. Dubinsky financed his activities.

Q: He was the head of the Ladies Garment Workers?

KAISER: He and I were very close friends. I was one of his pets, so to speak. So that Lovestone had to be very careful on how he dealt with me. That's how life works. My brother had been very helpful to David Morse when he was up for confirmation and several people tried to raise objections to him. Henry was a brilliant lawyer, my brother. He handled his defense very effectively. David said to him when he got confirmed, "Why don't you come to work for me?" He said, "No, I want to practice law. I want to stick to my law firm, but the guy you want to get is my brother. He did labor work at Oxford. He did some labor work in Wisconsin." And so David said, "Well, send him around and let me talk to him." So I came around and we hit it off immediately. A few days later he called me and said, "How would you like to come to Washington and be my executive assistant?" And I thought that would be a good thing to do, a new outfit. He was a very attractive character, Morse, a wonderful human being, and I went to work for him.

It was a happy marriage. We got along very well and we developed, we built up the office, the Bureau of International Labor Affairs. I became the director. We started off with, the bureau consisted of four or maybe five professionals. I last checked with the bureau, oh, I'd say maybe 10 years ago, and there were 100 people, 95 I think to be exact. He had a guy handling ILO affairs, international labor. He left and then he handed it over to me and then I became kind of his deputy really. My official title was director of the office of international affairs. Then when Truman got elected to the international labor organization, director general of the international labor organization. He was about to be appointed Secretary, but he preferred taking this job. This was just before the election of 1948. I got to know, as a civil servant, as the head of that bureau, the Secretary. Schwellenbach was the preceding secretary, but he died. The Boston Irish, Tobin, who had been mayor and governor -

Q: Maurice Tobin.

KAISER: - was selected as Secretary of Labor. We hit it off very well. The election came and he was the only one who cabinet guy who campaigned his heart out for Truman all over the country. Particularly among labor unions and so on. That's one of the faults I have with McCullough's book on Truman. It doesn't mention it's true about several people, including Tobin. Of course, Truman was delighted with him. There was a vacancy when the boss had gone off to Geneva to head up the ILO. Tobin decided to recommend me to the president for the job. I was all of 36 years old. The labor boys were all for me.

David Morse had done a very interesting thing. He had appointed a top-level labor advisory committee on international affairs and we would meet once a month and they would come. There were five AFL guys, five CIO guys, and a couple of guys from the railway unions, separate from both. This was the first time, very effective piece of work on David's part, the first time that the CIO and AFL sat down together. Five guys on each side were the top people in their respective outfits except for the president himself, except for Phil Murray and Bill Green. George Meany and Jim Carry. We'd meet and talk about the current international scene and labor's participation in it.

Q: Let's talk a bit about while you were with the Department of State. What were we doing, and your office, with the European situation and elsewhere? I mean as far as promoting our cause.

KAISER: What was involved mainly was briefing people who were going to meetings of the various organizations. That's all I remember very well; I wasn't there very long. What I just mentioned is what sticks out. Briefing people going to international meetings.

Q: Do you recall any involvement in the crucial election of 1948 in Italy? I know the CIA was putting a lot of money into that and I was wondering if your office got involved in helping the unions.

KAISER: Oh, yes, but not the State Department; the Labor Department. We got involved. It was war. This committee which was a big plus for me because I got to know all these characters and practically on a first name basis. I could pick up the phone and call George Meany anytime and Jim Carry, or Dave Dubinsky, or Jacob Potofsky. We became very close friends. It served me extremely well in subsequent years.

I was only briefly in the State Department. The advisory committee was used on the border landscape so that, for example, Dean Acheson asked to come over and speak to them before the White House, before Truman, publicly launched the Turkish aid program. He came over first to inform them and then to solicit their support, which they very avidly gave, and then did the same on the Marshall Plan. The first people to learn as far as I know about both of those programs - must have been others in the State Department and so on - were these two advisory committees. The first public groups, so to speak, as distinct from official groups. Dean Acheson, he was absolutely extraordinary in the way he handled these people. Just bowled them over, just charmed the pants off them. At the right time I'll talk about my relationship with Dean Acheson.

Q: All right, what about a figure who became quite prominent in our relations with unions in Europe was Irving Brown. Did he come up during your time?

KAISER: He was very much a player. I knew that he was subsidized by the CIA. I had good relations with him; he was also close to Dubinsky, which served me in good stead. Did we coordinate our work? Not really. Our labor attachï¿½s were put on the spot by Brown, and one or two of them made the mistake of becoming more Irving Brown's boys than Reuther's boys. There was a great temptation. He was an amazing operator. Of course, the equivalent of him on the CIO side was Vic Reuther, who came in later but was not as effective as Irving.

There was a lot of tension because the AFL refused to join the World Federation of Trade Unions because one of the organizers of it was the phony Soviet trade union movement. It was part of the breakaway and the AFL stuck with the traditional, there was another, older international federation going back to the late 19th Century. Irving was the one representing the AFL and Victor was CIO. He was a very strict operator and he built up his own network in Europe and elsewhere. He had plenty of dollars at his disposal and a hell of a lot of energy and charm. He was bright. We talked to each other, but I didn't let him get into it, I didn't get too involved. We also had a problem where we were trying to hire, I'm getting ahead of the story, for the new labor attaches, we were trying to hire people out of the labor movement. We did so somewhat successfully, and in one or two cases not so successfully. There was a great test of your diplomatic skill because when you picked one of them they had to be approved by the trade union advisory committee.

Q: I assume that the trade union advisory committee had their own agenda and it'd be very hard to find anybody who fit both sides. Who were these labor attaches? Did you have a problem with the hierarchy within the State Department accepting people who were not, you might say, traditional diplomats?

KAISER: A very good point. We had some leverage, very important. The leverage was the Foreign Service Act of 1946, which established the Board of the Foreign Service with very substantial powers. The board consisted of seven members, four State Department with the undersecretary, deputy undersecretary for administration was the chairman Jack Peurifoy, and one from agriculture, commerce and labor. This board among the other functions and powers, ruled on every employment and assignment. We appointed our deputies who were the acting committee. What the hell was it called? They passed on any appointment, so that when, it occurred on some of the cases, there was a division of Foreign Service Personnel in the State Department at that time who handled their involvement in the board. Every now and then they need a vote, so they'd come to me for the vote, to us, and I was able to use that, plus the fact that on some occasions they wanted my man to prove recommendations that he'd made for appointments.

I shouldn't tell you this story, but I'll tell you. This act gave us the legal basis for much of the work we were doing, very important. I decided to go all out on that appointments committee. The appointments and assignments board, that's what it was called. We had as Director of Personnel a remarkable character named Bob Barnett. He was through the whole agency. He had such integrity Stu, that he was the guy on the War Manpower Commission who ruled on deferments. He was a man of the highest integrity, and I appointed him to the board. Well, during this period Pete Martin, who was at that time director of the Board of the Foreign Service, called me and said, "I want to come over and see you about something very important." He came over and he said, "Phil, we're about to launch a new program: administrative officers in each of the embassies, particularly the large embassies. We have the perfect guy to launch this program. We want to put him into the embassy in Paris, and his name is Graham Martin, no relative of mine. Very attractive. But, he tells us that he would have a hard time getting the approval of your member of the board, Bob Barnett." I said, "Is there any?" And he said, "That's all I can tell you. Graham is certain that Bob would object to it." I'm being very honest. I just felt that if they wanted this guy, they must have gone through him and so on. I went to see my man Barnett. He was a very nice guy by the way, very attractive human being. He said, "Look, Phil, if you instruct me to approve him, I'll approve him. If you left it all on my own, I feel I would have to vote nay." I said, "Look, I'm not going to ask you what's involved, Bob, but if you can do it I'd appreciate it if you'd approve." And he did. It's terrible; I think I got two or three labor attaches appointed to new posts as a result of that. Graham became very successful and you know where he ended up don't you?

Q: Oh yes, he got on a helicopter out of Saigon. He was ambassador to Rome and was our last ambassador to South Vietnam, and very controversial. He held on to the very last. I've talked to many officers who worked under him.

KAISER: Isn't this an incredible story?

Q: It is.

KAISER: You got it out of me. Well, I'm glad I got it off my chest.

Q: What about some of these attaches?

KAISER: Some of them were brilliant. Some of them were very successful. The most successful was Sam Burger.

Q: I was going to ask about Sam Burger. I worked for Sam Burger in Saigon where he was deputy ambassador and I was consul general there. I had the highest regard for him.

KAISER: Great friend. We became kind of competitive. Let me tell you about Sam. Are you interested in Sam?

Q: Oh, yes.

KAISER: We met at the University of Wisconsin. He was a Perlman protï¿½gï¿½e. We became very good friends and he became more friendly with my brother Henry, the labor lawyer, very close friends. I saw a good deal of him in London '38 to '39 because he had, what was it, a Rockefeller grant or one of the famous grants, to study the British labor movement. He came over with his wife, spent a whole year there. Labor was way out of office at that time. It was after the McDonald disaster. Forgive me for diverting. A wonderful remark by Winston Churchill I've used it, made about McDonald. He said, "Ramsey McDonald could compress more words into less thought than any other man I know." Priceless remark. Sam, as part of his project went about cultivating all the labor leaders and trade union leaders in the country. He was very good at it. We went on holiday together that year, Christmas holiday.

When he ended up as labor attachï¿½ he became the key guy, when Labor won the election in '45, he became the key guy in the embassy. Really, Stu, he effectively ran the embassy. One of these characters who'd been neglected by everybody, except Sam. He became, he was literally on a first name basis, a real character. He had a better connection even though I had later on because of the Oxford experience. He got into trouble with Nixon and Nixon shipped him off to New Zealand. He became the DCM in New Zealand. When we visited Saigon to see our son we stayed with Sam.

Q: He was right across the street from where I lived, on that same street. He was ambassador to South Korea, too.

KAISER: Ellsworth Bunker had invited me to stay with him, but I stayed with Sam. I had my wife with me.

Q: The State Department apparatus was still an old boy's network, and the labor attachï¿½ was sort of a new manifestation, wasn't it?

KAISER: That's right. It took the ambassadors, after a while the ambassadors appreciated their value. We had several guys, we had Dick Eldridge in Paris who would do everything, but reported nothing. He really knew the whole story. I would see him three times a year on my way to Geneva. I'm going to talk to you at some length about the whole ILO experience. It's an important thing. We had Tom Lane, who was from a trade union family, who had been a colonel in the army in Italy and we had him as labor attachï¿½ because he knew everybody. I think these anecdotes add a little flavor.

Q: Well, they do. They're very important.

KAISER: I used to come to Geneva three times a year to the governing body and the annual conference on the ILO. On one occasion Tom said, "Look, you're coming this spring. It's a two-week meeting. Will you come and visit Rome in between." I said, "Yes, I'd be glad to." I'd been very active and I was pretty tired and I was relieved when I checked on Wednesday or Thursday about airplane connections and there was no feasible airplane from Geneva to Rome. This was a Wednesday or Thursday. I called Tom and I said, "Tom, I'm sorry, but I can't do it. There's no appropriate airplane connection." He said, "You've got to come." I said, "Well, I can't do it." He said, "What's your telephone number? I'll call you back in a while." In about half an hour he calls me back and he says, "Ambassador Dunn has made the air attachï¿½ available and we'll come up tomorrow and pick you up and bring you back." I said "What?" He said, "I'll explain it to you when I see you." He comes the next day and he says to me, "You had to come because I'm having a party in your honor Friday night. I've invited two key young guys in this town, the minister of labor and the head of the new non-communist trade union movement. Both of these guys are buddies of yours. They haven't been talking to each other for the last six months. We figured out the only way to get them together again is to exploit you. Have a party in your honor, invite them both." This is true. I got on the airplane and guess what happened? They had this big party and the two of them came and I got them together, we had pictures taken and so on. I flew back on Sunday and these sons of guns did a dirty trick on me. We flew over the Alps in Siberian weather, very crisp, clear, in a DC-3.

Q: Oh, boy, unpressurized.

KAISER: Not pressurized. We flew and I could see the altimeter. We flew at 15,000 feet. Boy did I have a headache. Lane knew all these characters. We had a wonderful guy in Israel. We had a very good guy, Oliver Peterson. Remember Esther Peterson? Well, we got him in Stockholm. He had trade union connections. That's a story I'll tell you next time, trying to get back to Washington to fight against the Taft-Hartley Law.

Q: Mr. Peterson was ambassador?

KAISER: He was labor attachï¿½.

Q: But wasn't his wife, she was?

KAISER: She was "Mrs. Consumer." Her grandson is married to my granddaughter. Small world. Very attractive. His father was very attractive. Oliver was a very attractive guy. He then became labor attachï¿½ in Brussels, which was very important because it was the headquarters of the international confederation of free trade unions.

Q: How did you see the competition with the Soviet Union and also the Soviet labor organizations? We should talk a bit about that. We're talking in the what's still the Truman administration, how about how was the Cold War fought on the labor front?

Today is the 23rd of June, 2005. You were doing what with the Truman administration?

KAISER: I was assistant secretary of labor for international affairs. It was a new assistant secretaryship set up at Truman's request when the awareness of the importance of organized labor in the Cold War struggle, and particularly, the aggressive efforts on the part of Moscow, the communists, to get control of the trade unions in Western European countries. They succeeded; the main trade union movements in both Italy and France were in communist control and this was a serious threat. They were organized to sabotage, among other things, the Marshall Plan. The communists of course were very much against. Historically, too, Stu, you've got to remember that the communist ideology was essentially, to begin with, a labor ideology.

Q: Workers of the world unite.

KAISER: So, a large share of their efforts were focused on concentrating on trade union movements. I first got to know Nixon when he went to Europe as a congressman. A group of congressmen went to Europe to have a look at how the Marshall Plan was going and he discovered the importance of the trade unions, labor, and called me up and asked me to come up and talk to him about that whole world and the nature of the problem and so on.

Q: Was there any thought that these labor movements, particularly in Italy and Germany, might be weaned away from Soviet control or were they seen as firmly within Soviet hands?

KAISER: That's a good question, but Germany is different. In Germany we did a job. This was one of the things we did in the Labor Department. We had to revive the German movement which had been pre-Hitler the most powerful trade union movement in the world, in Germany, and a good many of their leaders had been put in concentration camps. We had to set about reviving the trade union movement. One of the things we did which proved to be quite successful, it was our idea in the labor department, we brought over German trade unionists, leaders or imminent leaders, to spend time in America with American trade union families.

When I first proposed this to my American trade union committee, the committee on international affairs, they said "Oh, you mean to say the American government is going to pay to bring over foreign trade unionists?" And I said, "Yes, we're prepared to do that." And They cooperated very handsomely by arranging for these visitors to live with trade union families. That had a considerable impact. But of course people in our mission, our embassies and our military establishments, were very conscious of the importance of the trade union and redeveloping the trade union movement in Germany if we were going to reestablish democracy there. That worked pretty well. We did very well. We did the same thing in Austria. And when I came to be ambassador in Austria, one of the most dramatic examples, one of the guys who had visited when I was assistant secretary was now head of the Austrian trade union movement and president of the Austrian parliament. He had been a trade unionist. Germany and Austria were quite different from France and Italy.

Q: These parties, the ones in Germany and Austria, had an independent base. Now, within Germany and in Austria there were also communist controlled unions?

KAISER: No, there weren't. To the best of my knowledge and recollection, the communists made no headway. We did a very good job. Tell you an interesting story. David Dubinsky was the leader of the ladies garment workers. He visited a group of old German trade union leaders and invited them to come over to Germany. Of course being Jewish, too, he had a certain psychologically, there was a block or two in his mind. He went with the notorious Jay Lovestone.

Q: Oh, yes. He was the gray eminence of the ClO.

KAISER: He was financed by Dubinsky, see. They went together and about eight or ten German trade unionists. Lovestone noticed - Dubinsky told this story to me and then told it publicly - that uncharacteristically, Dubinsky kept quiet most of the time. He was struggling with his attitude about Germans. So, on the way back, Lovestone called him on this. He said to him, "There were about 10 German trade union leaders there, David, and all together they spent about 120 years in concentration camps. I should have told you that before we met with them and maybe you would have been a little more talkative." They very aggressively broke the movement, the Nazis did, and imprisoned most of them. In Italy though, in Germany and in France, non-communists organized their own trade unions. So, you had this competition.

Q: You still have it today. I mean certainly in Italy, and in France, too.

KAISER: That's right. I haven't kept up actually with the trade unions as I should in both countries, but its true that there was a communist party in both countries. We had to do a lot of fancy footwork and we wanted it pretty strictly constitutional when we succeeded in getting the non-communist French and Italian trade unions the status of the dominant trade union movements of the delegates for the international labor conferences and meetings. We used to work very hard on that.

Q: Did you get involved, time has gone by, with payoffs to the unions, the CIA particularly in 1948 in the elections in Italy got very much involved.

KAISER: Did the CIA finance it?

Q: Yes.

KAISER: I knew it was going on. I didn't get particularly involved. My fellow delegate that year was Senator Murray. We always took a senator along. Senator Murray was chairman of the labor committee.

Q: He was from Michigan, wasn't he?

KAISER: Montana.

Q: Montana.

KAISER: Big, tall, very successful.. Those were the days when we used to have Democrats from that part of the world. The minister of labor, this was a different occasion, came to see me. We were organizing, we were getting the ducks in a row to seat the non-communist movement in Italy at the ILO meeting and I took senator to lunch with me to meet the minister. He began talking about what he had done for the working people of Montana. He made it kind of a campaign speech. I began wiggling around (laughs). Finally, after about 10 minutes, he turned and he said to the minister, "But you don't vote in Montana do you?"

Q: How did we view, this is around '48 or so, the ILO? Was this a battleground in which we were fighting for the soul of the labor movement or what?

KAISER: The ILO had one act of communist labor: the Poles. I remember there was a Pole on the governing body and I used to have verbal hassles with him quite regularly. It was a pretty vigorous organization. It suffered from the fact that its impact was mainly on the willingness of the member countries to meet the standards, labor standards, that were developed by the ILO in their respective countries. Today for example the ILO could play and is trying to play a bit of a role on the international problem of raising the standards of living of the exploited workers in most of the countries of the world. They set the right kind of standards and they say the right kind of things and they write the right kind of reports, but that's the best they can do. Annually they are supposed to report on the extent to which they're meeting the standards agreed upon at the various meetings. They develop standards, see, but the reports are all sent in by the governments themselves and they're not always - to put it mildly - very reliable. But it played an important role in bringing together the workers from all over the world as well as employees and governments who are concerned with the well being of working people. They have these recommendations and these conventions which are treaties and we haven't ratified very many. We haven't been very good about that.

Q: In the international field, where did the British labor movement fit? I always think of the British labor movement particularly in those days having rather strong sympathies for the Soviet Union.

KAISER: Well, what happened was - and now you come to an important subject we have to deal with - there was an old international federation of trade unions, which was established a long time ago. The Americans, the AFL were in and out, but in at the time the war broke out. It was also, by the way a special relationship between the AFL and the British TUC and they would exchange every year a different one, every year an American labor guy.

Q: TUC is Trade Union Congress.

KAISER: The American would speak at the trade union annual meeting with the TUC, and at the AFL, a British speaker. It was a very close relationship between the Brits and the Americans. David Dubinsky during World War II opened up for transport workers, set up a canteen that they could repair to after they'd been out on the high seas and so on. He financed the whole thing. Now, at the end of the war a new international was set up. At the time the dream was that we would work together with the Soviets after the war, and it was called - what the hell was it called? - the WFTU, the World Federation of Trade Unions. The AFL refused to join.

It was the British who took the lead with the communists to organize the new world movement. The CIO joined the organization. The CIO had some communist leaders at that time. Another story. There was a big hassle between the two, so that, for example, we never picked a CIO guy as part of the delegation to the ILO conference or as participants in the governing body. The feeling was pretty intense between the AFL and CIO and we treated two world internationals.

The Marshall Plan led to the breakup of the WFTU because they came out against participation in the Marshall Plan.

Q: Did this include the Italians and French unions?

KAISER: They didn't break away, but the CIO left the World Federation. The pressures were too great and they broke away.

Q: What were the pressures on the CIO?

KAISER: The Marshall Plan. They were against the Marshall Plan.

Q: Was it the CIO against the Marshall Plan?

KAISER: No, they were in favor of the Marshall Plan. And when The WFTU came out against the Marshall Plan, they broke away.

Q: Where did the votes come from to oppose the Marshall Plan? I would have thought that particularly Western European countries were getting something out of it.

KAISER: No, the trade unions, the communist trade unions in Italy and France and some of the low countries took their orders from Moscow, so that they opposed the Marshall Plan. When the WFTU came out aggressively, openly, the CIO was on the spot and they withdrew and dropped from the World Federation. The key point was that the Marshall Plan led to the breakup of the World Federation of Trade Unions, and eventually the AFL and CIO got together in the middle '50s.

Q: Did we see the breakup of the World Trade Federation as a good thing?

KAISER: Oh, yes. We also were pleased that the CIO had broken away.

Q: The WFTU is considered a creature of Moscow.

KAISER: Exactly. When I was in Hungary, the head of the Hungarian trade union was president of the World Federation of Trade Unions and it still existed for the communist world.

Q: You were in the Department of Labor from when to when?

KAISER: I was a civil servant and I went over I think in 1947 and I was there until 1953. They wanted to elect me as chairman of the governing body, this was after the Eisenhower had been elected, I stayed on another eight or nine months, and I didn't think it was right and I had a lot of pressure to accept. As a matter of fact I lasted one more year, but I refused to accept the chairmanship.

Q: Did we see targets of opportunity of weaning unions away from the Federation of Unions or not, international unions?

KAISER: Well, yes, we tried. We go back to the bigger ties with the French and the Italians and what we did was, we helped organize non-communist trade unions. In the low countries I don't think they were communists, the dominant unions were not communist. We helped reorganize the trade unions in Germany and Austria.

Q: Did we see a problem of reorganizing these unions by perhaps taking away some of their militancy? After all, unions is not just in the big world, but also within the country of getting a better deal for the workers. Was there a concern that these tame unions might also become overly tame with big business?

KAISER: Well, I haven't reached that stage. The AFL was pretty active in Central and South America where the problem wasn't so much communists. The problem was reactionary governments and powerful industrial interests, largely American.

Q: Like American banana companies and things of this nature.

KAISER: Serafino Rinaldi was a wonderful guy working for the AFL. He did yeoman work in getting organized in China, trying to organize workers in Latin America. The answer to these damned free trade agreements would be stronger unions to see to it that the workers in the backward countries would be organized and would be getting decent wages so that it would reduce the incentive for moving our off-shoring our companies because workers get so little. We had the same experience in the early trade union movement in America, where the unionized companies would move south. Well, you have it to this day, Stu. All the workers have done a poor job in organizing the workers of foreign car companies. Where are they located? They're all located in the south. They have no unions.

Q: The textile business, too. Who was the secretary of labor while you were there?

KAISER: Maurice Tobin.

Q: Were you seeing eye to eye?

KAISER: He was wonderful. He announced to his top people that as far as international affairs are concerned, Phil Kaiser is the secretary of labor. He was absolutely 100% supportive. It was standard practice that ministers of labor would come to visit the ILO annual conference and he came one year. He was a terrific orator from the old school and he gave an incredible speech after staying up all night with the Irish minister of labor. He literally did not go to sleep.

Q: How about what was happening in Japan because MacArthur -

KAISER: We had Japanese characters over, and we had Koreans. I have a Korean gift, a rather interesting little candelabra that I shouldn't have taken. Did I tell you how we got MacArthur overruled?

Q: No.

KAISER: Well, that's a great story. MacArthur was thinking of running for president and he decided he was going to help develop a trade union movement in Japan. He hired one of the officials of the AFL to be his top advisor. He signed agreements. The Occupational Authority signed the trade union agreements with the rising trade union movement. He signed the agreement, I think it was, with the transport workers. Something went haywire and he broke the agreement, MacArthur did. So we decided to call him on it rather presumptuously on our part.

This is a true story, but I don't want you to think that I'm blowing my horn too loudly, but this is what happened. I had advising us on this area a wonderful guy named Arnold Steinhardt who was an Austrian refugee who was an expert in government unions. He had worked in the Austrian ministry of labor and he was a short guy, very bright, a real character. I called the undersecretary of the army and said I wanted to come over and lodge a protest to the secretary of the army about MacArthur's action. The meeting was arranged and I came over with Steinhardt.

I did a little dirty work. Arthur Goldberg who was in the CIO, a lawyer, I knew that he knew Kenneth Royall, the secretary of the army. I alerted Arthur to what was going on, and would he put in a word, and he said he'd be glad to do it. So we came there, me and Steinhardt. I knew the undersecretary in charge of occupied areas, and he had a whole roster of people. Two or three generals and then a high powered lawyer from New York. I knew the law firm. Arnold made a very good presentation of the facts, and what a bad precedent it was to break an agreement without recourse to discussion, and attempt to work out the differences, without taking such drastic action. They had this lawyer who gave a long speech about the trade unions hadn't developed very much, it takes a long time and so on, blah, blah. A big high powered guy.

So when we were through with the formalities, the secretary began asking questions. The big argument they made was that it would diminish MacArthur's authority in the eyes of the Japanese if he were overruled. The fact of the matter was, Lucius Clay had been overruled on some matter a few weeks before in Germany. When we got through, I'll never forget this, Royall, who was a big hulk of a guy, turned around and he looked out the window for a few seconds, turned back, turned to the undersecretary and said, "Overrule MacArthur. Tell him to grant the unions their, meet their demands, and comply with the contract that we signed." That's what happened.

Q: It is hard to imagine, but in those days of course MacArthur was practically untouchable.

KAISER: That's right. One of the highlights of my experience as assistant secretary. I'll never forget, "Overrule MacArthur." And they all left. That was the end, no more.

Q: Who was MacArthur's labor person?

KAISER: What the hell was his name? It was a guy from the AFL-CIO. I can't remember now. He had a key job in the AFL. He thought he was going to run for president, but it never came off.

Q: That would have been in '52, he went into Wisconsin and all and it just didn't come off. You left in 1953, this was of course when the Eisenhower administration came in. By the way, while you were at the Department of Labor was there a spirit of cooperation with the Republican wing? I think of Vandenberg and others in those days. It wasn't as confrontational.

KAISER: I told you about Nixon. I remember once my when I was in Geneva the appropriations committee cut my operation quite significantly and the secretary of labor called me to tell me about it and said he was going to do all he can to restore it. He said, "I think maybe you should call Senator Nixon because he's quite favorable about what you're doing." The Marshall Plan, we were very active in the Marshall Plan. I prepared the memo. The memo was in my name, but the people down below did it. Industrial development, which became a key document. The great thing about the Marshall Plan, Stu, was the collaboration. As I often said, the Lord was looking after us, - to produce at one time to toughen American political life - Harry Truman, George Marshall, Dean Acheson and Arthur Vandenberg. It was a God given gift. There was a wonderful atmosphere.

Q: Today is the 1st of July, 2005.

1953: you've left the Department of Labor and first you're with the Committee for Free Europe?

KAISER: That's right.

Q: Could you explain what that was about and what it was doing at that time?

KAISER: The Committee for Free Europe, its function was to try to sustain the idea of independence, of liberty, in the occupied Soviet occupied areas. Poland, Warsaw, the Baltic countries and so on. I'm trying to recall whether it had radio facilities. I think it did.

Q: Was that Radio Free Europe?

KAISER: Yes, Radio Free Europe was under the Committee for Free Europe.We produced material for radio to use, to be broadcast to all of the occupied countries. I wasn't there very long, but it was long enough to draft for them a basic policy paper on how to deal with the labor side of the picture. It was interesting. Of course, I commuted. I didn't move to New York. I would come home weekends. They would pay for all the travel, the weekend travel. It was a good collection of people. There was a well-known guy named Whitney Shepperson. It was an agreeable experience.

Q: Did it get caught up in the various disputes among the different countries and the representatives of the peasant's party. In other words, all these disparate groups that represented an opposition?

KAISER: It was one of the problems that I had to deal with. I got involved, too in the '56 Hungarian Revolution. That was later, but that became a very hot issue. Actually when I was in Normandy I acted as a consultant for them. Harriman was very happy to allow that to take place. I made two trips to Europe while I worked for Harriman on behalf of the committee.

Q: Was this purely a private organization or was there government control?

KAISER: It was government financed.

Q: Was this overt government financed?

KAISER: I can't answer that question. I'm not sure. But I don't think anybody had any illusions.

Q: No, but it was a period of time when the CIA was just getting going, but it was supporting various groups because the Soviets were supporting -

KAISER: I was on a special group, it was a board of five of us and one of the board was Norman Thomas. A very attractive person and we became good friends actually. It was only later that we discovered (laughs) that this outfit was subsidized by the CIA, but we didn't know it at the time. Certainly, he never, let alone myself, would have served on the board, which was a CIA operation. They spread their wings far and wide at that time.

Q: It was a time when everybody was trying things out. It didn't have the same taint I suppose that it would have today.

KAISER: The Cold War was then very much in play in the 1950s. It's against that background that you got to appreciate all these things that were going on, Stu.

Q: How did you come to move with Averell Harriman?

KAISER: It came easy. While I was still working for Free Europe. Averell, first of all, offered me a job. He had set up at that time the Roosevelt Foundation. He had offered me a job with the foundation as a, "cover" is hardly the word, but the idea was that I would help him in his campaign for nomination for governor. I told him I would do that extracurricular while I was still working for the committee. I did join his campaign and he used me very effectively and then he went to speak before labor audiences and he'd ask me to come along.

Q: So, you were basically the labor man?

KAISER: For him, yes, at that time. Also I was liaison with the labor unions in the New York area in particular, where there was a Liberal Party which was financed by two trade unionists, David Dubinsky and Alec Rose who was the hatters union. Dubinsky was the lady garment workers union. They were very important. They played a very important role in New York. See, I had the advantage of knowing personally all the top labor leaders in America, particularly these two. In fact, Dubinsky played a role in my securing that job with Free Europe. He introduced me to Adolph Burley. Remember that character? Oh, boy what a character he was.

Q: What was his background? The name is familiar.

KAISER: I think he was a professor. He wrote that book on corporations, with an economist. He did not like Dean Acheson. I remember that very well. We became friends and he said, "Why don't you go to work for the committee," and that's how that happened. I got to work and I got interested in the campaign.

Q: Had Harriman had much of a background or connection with the labor movement or was he moving in, because he was mainly an overseas operator I would think.

KAISER: Yes, he had established contact. He realized how important the labor side was and there is a picture in my book of a meeting in Paris with me, with Harriman. This was under the Marshall Plan and he was head of it in Europe. There's a picture of him, Meany and myself. That reminds me of a very amusing story.

Q: Oh, you can tell it, why not?

KAISER: We crossed the ocean together on a ship, Meany and his wife, a nice big Irish woman from the Bronx. In order to get to dinner on time, that Averell was giving for Meany, they sent a car to pick us up at Cherbourg and drive us. On the way we stopped to have lunch. We stopped at a hotel restaurant. She said to me, Mrs. Meany, that she would like a fruit salad but without any alcohol because the French always pour alcohol on fruit salad. Can you manage it? I said I thought so. My French was pretty good. I told the waiter, "salad de fruits sans alcohol," without alcohol. "Compris?" "Oui." Then a big bowl came out, and there is alcohol in it. I called the waiter over and I said to him, "Did you understand what I want?" "Oh, yes, but whoever heard of eating fruit salad without alcohol?" A wonderful French story.

Q: I was just wondering how did Harriman's chances look, what was the situation when he was looking at running for governor of New York at that time?

KAISER: Well he'd done a pretty good job. You know who his opponent was? Franklin Roosevelt, Jr. Much more charm. Franklin, that's another story that I'll talk about at another time. We became very good friends even though I worked against him. He had Ed Flynn.

Q: Oh, yes, the boss of the Bronx.

KAISER: A very important guy. I think I said this to you before. An unsung hero in American life. Responsible for FDR and Harry Truman. That's quite a responsibility, quite an achievement, not to be unrecognized and unappreciated.

Q: Yes.

KAISER: I ought to talk to McCullough about this sometime. He had to get nominated. The nomination took place, for the convention, with delegates chosen in various parts of the state. The key element was New York: Manhattan and Brooklyn. Brooklyn even bigger than Manhattan, really. The boss was Sharkey. My old brain, I remember these names, it impresses even me.

Q: It impresses me.

KAISER: The key players were Carmine De Sapio and Al Sharkey. Carmine came out for Averell. Now, technically, the delegates were chosen in a vote by members of the party. Actually, the boss was controlling all these votes. What happened was in New York City, Manhattan, there was a big hassle between two labor leaders. One was for Averell and another one for Franklin Jr. As the numbers became clear as to where they were going, Sharkey in Brooklyn became key. He was the guy who would determine. He was very much under the thumb of Carmine De Sapio. Young Franklin had to make a decision whether to actually campaign for the delegates, put up the roster of his own delegates so that the Democrats of Brooklyn would be able to have a vote. But he decided not to take that gamble, he was talked out of it, and Sharkey went for Averell. Franklin was nominated for attorney general. The Republicans put up Javits. Averell's majority was smaller than Franklin D. Roosevelt's in 1928: Roosevelt's was 24,000, Averell's was 13,000.

Q: How did he use you? Were you making speeches, going around and talking to labor people?

KAISER: I briefed him, like for example, Tom Dewey the Republican, the guy running against Averell was Senator Orange. And they produced some pretty unpleasant experiences of Averell in Averell's history. First, that he'd once been indicted, but the indictment was squashed. A shenanigan, a deal in Brooklyn and stuff. Two, that he had trouble with a union, but George Meany took care of that, gave him a clean bill. And, three, that even after Hitler took over Germany, Brown Brothers and Harriman continued to do business. Their branch in Germany.

When that came out, this will answer your question, when that came out in the press, the morning he was going to speak to the most Jewish group in New York, the liberal group. He was going to speak before Dubinsky. He said he asked me to go along. He said, "What do I do?" I said, "Well, Averell, you laugh at it." He said, "What do you mean?" "You just say, I'm the guy who did A, B, C, D during the war. I was FDR's ambassador to Churchill." The things he did during the war. "This is too ridiculous for any comment to suggest that I did anything to help Hitler," and it went down very well. He really did it very well. There was a lot of laughter in the audience.

But before he spoke to any of these meetings, he would ask me for advice and he would take me along. He made a speech, the top aid to Wagner, in which he said that the Republicans had dominated legislature and Dewey penalized New York City when it came to the distribution of state aid to education. The Republicans picked this up and boy did they do a job upstate: "If you elect Harriman as governor..." Harriman had to repudiate this guy. This is maybe, Stu, less than a week before the election. They produced figures that just absolutely swamped upstate with propaganda saying, proving, that if Harriman was elected this guy would follow this formula and upstate would lose enormous amount of educational aid That almost cost him the election.

Q: Was Harriman's marital situation at that time an issue?

KAISER: Well, no, he was happily married. His first wife had died and he was married to his second wife who was a terrific gal, a wonderful gal.

Q: How long were you with Harriman?

KAISER: Well, for his whole term, four years, '55 to '59.

Q: Did the international side get involved during that time?

KAISER: I went to Europe a couple of times for the Free Europe Committee. He never lost his interest in international affairs. In fact a character wrote a biography of Harriman who was a little surly about me because I couldn't see him. I never talked to him. He quoted one of Harriman's people critical of me, saying I used to waste the governor's time by talking about foreign affairs. That's all I ever wanted to talk about was foreign affairs.

Q: What was Harriman's relationship to President Eisenhower at the time?

KAISER: There was no relationship. As a matter of fact, I was involved on one occasion. I and there was a Democratic governor of New Jersey, one I guess, was Illinois, and a representative of the three. I was representative of Averell. We met in Chicago as I recall and we prepared a blast against Eisenhower's economic policy. He was already running for president, see, in '56. He ran for the nomination against Adlai. The Monday after he was elected as governor, he started to talk about being president. After all if you're governor of New York, Teddy Roosevelt, Charles Evans Hughes, Franklin D. Roosevelt, you were a natural candidate for president. That got him into trouble because the Stevenson people were very strong in New York. They wanted to re-nominate Stevenson.

Q: What was Harriman's relationship to Adlai Stevenson during this period you were there?

KAISER: It was civil. Did Adlai ever come up to New York to Albany before? He came up after he was nominated again. He made one of his first speeches there. It wasn't close. They had communication, but it wasn't close. It got him into trouble at the end.

Q: I'm surprised that Eisenhower didn't have some sort of contact with Harriman because they were both working the same side of the street in Europe for a long time.

KAISER: One thing that did happen, that during the '56 crisis, there was a crisis in the Middle East.

Q: That was the Suez crisis and the Hungarian Revolution.

KAISER: At the same time. Harriman was furious when Dulles called a midnight meeting of the Security Council in order to condemn the British, the French and the Israelis. I remember. Boy, he, I was a recipient of his passion. He said, "What the hell, what in God's name was he rushing about? Why did he have to do that?" The Russians threatened military action unless the French and the British withdrew. He couldn't have been more critical of Eisenhower and Dulles.

Q: Was there much of a relationship at all with John Foster Dulles, the Secretary of State?

KAISER: Interestingly enough (laughs),small world, remember Foster Dulles had a grandfather who was Secretary of State? What was his name? Lansing?

Q: It might have been Lansing,

KAISER: That's important. She, the widow, was still alive. He was a Democrat. The Secretary of State was a Democrat in Wilson's cabinet.

Q: That would have been Lansing.

KAISER: Averell used to call on her. She lived in upstate New York.

Q: How did you find your role as a political operative? Was this something you wanted to continue to do?

KAISER: What happened was, the labor boys financed a chair for me when Averell got licked. They set up a chair, which made the professorship at the new school of international service for the American University.

Q: Well, Harriman was beaten by Rockefeller. Was that right?

KAISER: Yes.

Q: How did you feel about Rockefeller?

KAISER: I knew Nelson and he wanted me to stay on, but I refused to do it. I left. He was a very nice guy, Nelson. The tragedy was that I didn't want to go through with it in1958. I talk about it in my book. At the convention, with Averell, it got all screwed up with who should run for senate. All the liberals of New York, the Liberal Party and Democrats, wanted Tom Finletter. He was a very good guy. Averell never forgave him for supporting Stevenson in '56 instead of him. We had the excuse of saying. with two Protestants it's a bad idea (governor and senator). The senator should be a Catholic. We had that terrible convention where he destroyed himself. Where De Sapio pulled a fast one and nominated the attorney general, Hogan. A very good guy. The governor was humiliated. He got a candidate for the senate, and he wasn't accepted.

At the convention, Carmine lined up with the leader of the democrats in Buffalo, Erie County. The two power centers of the Democratic Party. The first speech Rockefeller made, his research was very good. The first speech was in 1922 with Democrats meeting also in Buffalo. What had happened was, Smith was elected in 1918, defeated in 1920 in a Republican landslide. It was only two years, then, the governor. Then in '22, he was sure that he was going to win. He came up to Buffalo and he found that Randolph Hearst had lined up all the bosses to support him for the United States senate. Smith called the bosses together and said, "Gentlemen; there's a choice to make. You can have me for governor or Hearst for senator, but you can't have both." So they dropped Hearst, whereas Harriman had a candidate, not a bad guy. Irish Catholic who was chairman of the Atomic Energy Commission. What the hell was his name? Murray, I think. He destroyed himself. He was badly defeated. Terrible. Crushing defeat.

Q: Well, then you came to Washington. What was at the American University?

KAISER: One of the original professors. I taught courses in international labor. I had some very good students. I had a seminar and I organized evening meetings with prominent labor leaders. They all chipped in to set up this chair. Averell was very good. He was very stingy on money. He contributed to the chair.

Q: You were at American University from what '59 to '61. What was the situation in the international labor unit? Had there been much of a change?

KAISER: At that time the big tension between AFL and the CIO particularly dramatized by the fact that the CIO belonged to the World Federal of Trade Unions with the communist unions. The AFL stuck with the old movement. Did it exist anymore; did they have to recreate it? No, it continued. The old movement continued.

Q: Did you get students there from say France and Italy and other places where the battle was going on?

KAISER: I got students. I entertained visitors from there and I got students from the labor movement. They got scholarships and we produced some labor attachï¿½s from them. I had students who came for the graduate course. So, I had trade union characters. Several students. The courses were quite popular, actually. It was a satisfactory experience.

Q: Well, did you get involved in the Kennedy campaign at all?

KAISER: Very much so.

Q: How did that come about?

KAISER: It came about because of Byron White. We were good friends. He was made chairman of Citizens for Kennedy. We tried to get this Carry character, Republicans who were coming out for him, to set up the citizens for Carry outside the Democratic Party set up but they never got any response from it.

Q: Carry being the last senator, yes.

KAISER: Byron asked me to be one of his deputies. That's how I got involved in the campaign. Byron was very much involved. Bobby just really worshiped Byron, because Byron was everything he wanted to be, a big football star, a brilliant student. And he had made him deputy attorney general later on, but in the campaign I got to know Bobby well and I got to know the president. I saw Bobby regularly and we became very good friends because he was, he used the citizens very effectively in three or four states.

Q: Did you get involved the crucial primary which was in West Virginia, but in other places? There's not much of a labor movement is there in West Virginia? Well, the miners.

KAISER: Oh, yes. The miners were big at that time. When Lewis came up and Humphrey, or what he did, I don't remember. I worked mostly in Illinois, but I did some in Michigan and worked a lot here. I didn't give up the teaching job.

Q: Well, Kennedy was elected and took office in January '61. How did that affect you?

KAISER: He asked me to become ambassador, I guess later that year. I was there from '61 to '64. I was there for three years. Senegal.

Q: This was of course a time when there was a great deal of optimism about Africa, you know, new winds were blowing.

KAISER: That's right. All these colonial areas were becoming independent.

Q: When you arrived here, what was the situation there?

KAISER: The situation was that originally there was an attempt to form a union between Senegal and Mali and that broke apart very dramatically the year before I got there. Senghor was a remarkable character. The president of Senegal. He had integrated his position very effectively and he was the darling of the French people, very popular in France. He had been a very successful member of the national assembly and a member of the French government. He'd been secretary of state and in one or two cabinet posts. They seemed to be the most stable of the African countries. They weren't that stable because Senghor had a problem with his prime minister who was very left wing. Senghor was a moderate socialist. When I asked Chet Bowles, "Why do you want to send me to Senegal?" He said, "This fellow that runs the country, Senghor, he's a Leon Blum socialist and that's a world few people know better than you." And we did hit it off.

Q: Where was the prime minister coming from? Was he coming out of the Marxist camp?

KAISER: Very left wing, a big political crisis where he tried to overthrow Senghor and Senghor outsmarted him. I was kind of in the middle of the crisis, actually.

Q: How did you get in the middle?

KAISER: In terms of trying to disentangle it what was going on and trying to find out before the issue was settled. I kept in close touch with the French ambassador. I had a whole gang of technical advisors to the various departments. The Senegalese government, there was a French conseille technique in practically every ministry. They knew what the hell was going on. He was captured. The French were very good to him. The Senegalese army supported the president, Senghor, captured and arrested the prime minister and one or two of his top people. He was sentenced to life imprisonment and shipped to another part of the country. It was very tense in that 48-hour period.

Q: Particularly in those early years, you must have felt you were in a difficult position because I'm sure the French were jealous as hell of their control and the Americans are very suspicious of what they were trying to do all throughout their.

KAISER: A very good point. My last instruction from Dean Rusk. Rusk was a great friend and we worked very closely together in the Truman administration. He said, "We don't want to displace the French. On the contrary, we want the French to do a good job and to keep these characters, keep these people, as the head of the left wing. Don't try to displace the French." Did I ever tell you this? About the Israeli specialist in Africa?

Q: No.

KAISER: Shortly before I was leaving, I had already been briefed, to Africa, the Israeli ambassador, originally English, Abe Harmon, a very nice guy, called me up, a good friend. He said, "Look, Phil, I know you've been briefed and so on, but our leading expert on Africa who spent the last five years in Africa, Ehud Avriel, is in Washington. It would do you no harm to spend an hour or so with him." Two things I remember. He said, "Be very careful in how you deal with the French community." There were about 35,000 French in Dakar. "It's really a love hate relationship between the Senegalese and the French. If the Senegalese think you're too close to the French you are going to pay dearly for that. On the other hand, you have to develop working relationships with the French." Then he said something to me that I try to tell every other person I've known who is going out to be ambassador. He said to me, "The American ambassador has no identity problem. Don't go around trying to show what a big shot you are and so on and so forth." A wonderful line, don't you agree, Stu?

Q: Oh, absolutely. Too many people feel that they're doing their job as if they're sort of campaigning out in the field. It has nothing to do with the job.

KAISER: I love that line. "The American ambassador has no identity problem." I profited a great deal from that advice.

Q: We've just gotten you to Senegal in 1961. We've talked a little bit about your trying to walk the line between the French community and the Senegalese community and not to annoy either of them, but then we'll talk about what happened while you were there and various things that occurred during that time.

KAISER: Just to put the end on this, I developed a very good relationship with the French ambassador, Lucien Paye, who was a very distinguished guy, a lovely guy. We were neighbors, too. He had been, that was a very complimentary point to the Senegalese, rector of the University of Dakar and then had been minister of education back in France. Then, appointed ambassador to Senegal. Subsequently, after I left Senegal, he was the first Western ambassador to come to China. He was a very impressive character and we became very good friends.

At the height of that crisis between the prime minister and the president I walked about four or five blocks away from our embassy to see him. The crisis had not been resolved yet and I wanted to get his take. While he's talking to me, his chief of intelligence walked in and I wanted to get up. He said, "No, stay. There are no secrets between you and me." The guy paused and said, "They've got Senghor trapped between the 10th floor and 8th floor," or whatever it was. He left and he came back and then he corrected himself. It made me a little dubious about how reliable he was, but in any case, this was the evidence that the game was practically over. He was about to be taken. He was taken and put into the VIP prison in the VIP house, visitors house, which bordered my residence, the ambassador's residence. The house was surrounded by military people in the hot sun and some of the military people moved into my garden in order to get relief from the sun. When I came back to the residence my two young sons said, "Father, that's illegal, that's American property and they shouldn't be there." They were very insistent. I had to call the chief of staff who was a friend of mine, Senegalese and said, "Will you please get your soldiers off my property?" In the Senegal experience, the big crisis was the Cuban missile crisis.

Q: Today is the 8th of July, 2005. First place, before we move to the Cuban missile crisis, could you talk about your relationship with Senghor?

KAISER: Two things he liked. First of all he knew that I had a personal relationship with Kennedy. Stu, I should make this point before I go any further, Kennedy was the president, first of all, who picked ambassadors who had substantive reason for being picked for those posts. He was the only president in recent times who did not sell ambassadorships. In other words, he appointed non-career people, and all the non-career people with one exception were people who were experts in the countries to which they were assigned. Japan, Reischauer; Galbraith in India; Lincoln Gordon in Brazil.

Q: Even career; my ambassador in Yugoslavia was George Kennan.

KAISER: Kennan and David Bruce were technically non-career.

Q: They had more ambassadorships than any career ambassador and important ambassadorships.

KAISER: Who was the general he appointed in Paris?

Q: Oh, yes, Gavin.

KAISER: He figured, the kind of guy to deal with de Gaulle.

Q: Didn't work out too well, but the idea was.

KAISER: All over the place. I think I told you, when I asked Chet Bowles who was at that time handling ambassadorial appointments, Bowles said, "Well, this fellow Senghor is brilliant, but his politics is essentially the politics of the Leon Blum socialists," (Blum was one of his heroes) "and that's a world with which you are utterly familiar." At that time I was a professor, see, and indeed, in his response to my credentials he made a big thing about the academic and my interest.

Q: He was a professor.

KAISER: It turned out to be the case. We got along extremely well. My French was adequate. It wasn't as good as, very few people had French as good as his French, but we hit it off from the very beginning. I was always uninhibited in my dealings with him. To supplement that generalization, on one or two occasions, I walked in to him and said, "Mr. President; I'm going to ask President Kennedy to recall me." "What do you mean?" "Well, you said so and so and I can't, I find that very difficult for an American ambassador to accept as a reasonable position vis-?-vis the United States." We'd talk about it, I talked him out of it and I was always accessible. I never had any problem with him. Any time I wanted to see him I saw him. At one stage he said to me, "Will you do me a favor? Every now and then, would you go and see the foreign minister because his nose is out of joint because you see me all the time and don't see him."

To go way, way ahead, when I was replaced and I told him I was going to leave, he made all the right motions - how sorry, too bad you're going - and then I told him I was going to replaced by Mercer Cook who is your close friend, a professor at Howard, who translated several of his books into English. "Well," he said "Mercer Cook is a lovely man and he's my good friend, and I accept the compliment, but tell me frankly, Mr. Ambassador, does he know the Kennedys as well as you know them?" I had as easy relationship as any ambassador could hope to have with the head of the government he's accredited to.

Q: Did Senghor have the trait that's so apparent today and has been apparent for a long time, but this is way back, of the French intellectuals and the disdain for the United States?

KAISER: No. He had a very good, his attitude, well, look, to answer your question, he translated our leading black poet into French.

Q: Langston Hughes?

KAISER: Langston Hughes. When he came here, the question came as who to invite to the presidential lunch and the name Langston Hughes came up. Somebody said, "Well, he's pretty left wing," and Kennedy got furious. Anybody raising any question about Langston Hughes. Of course he was invited to the lunch. He had a tremendous admiration for Kennedy and so that shaped his attitude toward the United States and he knew the United States. He had visited here. One of his best poems, what the hell is it called, is about Harlem, I think. He wrote some poems about the American blacks..

I have to tell you one other story. I gave a long pitch once about Thomas Jefferson and what he meant, what he represented if you want to understand America, one of the things you have to appreciate was an understanding of Thomas Jefferson. He said, "Could you get me a book on the life of Jefferson in French?" I called the embassy in Paris and said, "Surely we have a translation of one of the well known biographies of Jefferson." They sent me the book and it has an introduction by Marshall. I don't remember the name. He was hated by all the African blacks. He was a right wing French general, imperialist general. I guess what they thought was it was more readable. It was stupid. I didn't give him the book because once he saw the introduction I was afraid he'd say, "What kind of stuff is Kaiser trying to sell me?" So, I never gave him the book.

Q: For the historical record, you better explain what the Cuban missile crisis was and then down in Senegal what happened.

KAISER: The missile crisis was of course, put very simply, we discovered that the Russians had put in place missiles in Cuba.

Q: This is in October of 1962.

KAISER: They could easily reach the United States. The problem was to get those missiles, those nuclear missiles, out of there. One of the first things Kennedy did was he laid a blockage around the country, around Cuba. Having done that, the people in Washington realized that the only way that the blockade can be broken was by airplane from Moscow to Havana. But in order to do so, they weren't these long range planes at that time, they had to stop and refuel in West Africa. And the best airport by a country mile, was in Dakar, the capital of Senegal.

Q: We'd used it during World War II. It was our major filtering point of supplies for Africa.

KAISER: That's right. Anytime Roosevelt came he stopped off to resupply there. So, I got communication from Washington with the text of the president's speech that he was going to deliver to the American people that night. The situation in Cuba and what he was going to do about it. Very interesting. It said, "Show Senghor the speech and tell him how important it is that Dakar deny Soviet use of airplanes en route to Havana." I immediately called his top aide and said I had to come over immediately. He said, "I might as well tell you this, Ellender is in town."

Q: He was a senator from Louisiana. He just traveled everywhere.

KAISER: He was looking to pick up information to cut the aid and information programs in Africa. I had a date with the president. Ellender said he was coming. I went to see Senghor and I said to him in French, "He's a racist, he's a reactionary, but he is chairman of the committee on appropriations." Senghor said, "Excellence, je comprends," ("I understand"). That became one of the great lines of the diplomatic corps in Dakar because I told them the story. He said, "Why don't you come a half-hour before. He's coming in an hour." He could read English and he said, "Oh, c'est trï¿½s sï¿½rieux, n'est-ce pas?" ("it's very serious isn't it?"). I said yes, and I told him. What had happened was that Sekou Toure, that scoundrel, Guinean, of all the left wingers and later on killed a dozen.

Q: Oh, he had a horrible regime.

KAISER: And he, at that particular moment, was enamored with Kennedy and he had sent word to the airport. His airport was as primitive as can be. I used that to begin with. I said, "Your friend Kennedy would find it very difficult to understand if Sekou Toure has denied the Soviet's use and you have not done so. I put it entirely on the personal Kennedy basis. He said to me, the left wing prime minister, the communist leader of the party, he said, "Give me a memorandum tomorrow morning, or have one of your aides hand me a memorandum giving me the whole background on the communist meeting, and be sure you include in the memorandum the fact that Sekou Toure has denied his airport." I made that commitment.

But this is a sort of a footnote. Ellender came in and I stayed with him. Unprovoked, unsolicited, said, "There's been some business about Cuba lately" and so on, and he downplayed the whole thing. I sat there, and Senghor handled him beautifully, superbly in every possible way, charmed the pants off him. On the way out, Ellender said to me, "Are you sure this man is all black?" I said, "Well you saw him didn't you?" He said, "He must have some white blood in him. He's too intelligent."

So we went back and we got this memorandum prepared all in French, every officer spoke good French, some better. I got Steve Low who was the political officer to deliver the memorandum at 8:00 the following morning. Late that morning I got word that they were going to deny the use of the airport to the Soviets. My little contribution.

Q: Well, but of course this was a key place. No doubt about it.

KAISER: It's a wonderful example, too, of president to president.

Q: Oh, yes.

KAISER: He had visited Washington before. In effect what I did, Stu, was call a spade a spade. He came through this to your friend Kennedy.

Q: As a footnote, Ellender was a big proponent of sugar quotas. I don't know if he was corrupt or not, but I suspect he was, but he made a point of traveling all over. He wanted to get his passport stamped with every country. He came to Yugoslavia when I was there and I remember we had to work with the I think I was the Romanians to get him - he just wanted to go in and out of the place just to get his passport stamped. He would write long accounts of his travels and all.

KAISER: He liked Russia. He was favorably disposed in some ways to the Soviet Union. It was very interesting this reactionary from Louisiana. I knew him because he was on the appropriations committee when I was the assistant secretary of labor. I had to appear before him to get my budget.

Q: Well, did you have problems with the prime minister? Did he belong to the anti-capitalist, anti-American camp or not?

KAISER: I didn't see him very often. It's interesting. I got Food for Peace for them, and I dealt with him on that, the practical side. It generated enough currency to build several schools and to build a major road link about 25 miles between the main vegetable producing area and the port of Dakar for export to France. Of course that was all plus positive. I also got him, the army (our army) in France made available some very good road building equipment. They were replacing it with more modern. They cabled me inquiring whether Senegal would like to have this very good, still effective, road building equipment. In the first instance I went to see the prime minister. He was a little leery. He thought I was trying to pawn off some useless secondhand stuff. Then to my great surprise, he got back and he said, "We'd love to have it." It turned out to be very valuable and very useful. The first stretch of building we had a ceremony.

They not only did it, but it got in the newspapers, a big front-page story, and we built some very good roads. It was a big plus. I can't say I had a, he was not an easy character. Remember he tried to remove Senghor in the rebellion. He and his minister of the interior. I think we talked about that before. I had dinner one night, the French ambassador, which was a great compliment really, Mendes-France was visiting and he was very popular in France because he was the prime minister and also was very liberal about North Africa. He was a very attractive character. That was the only time I saw him. It was just the French ambassador and the prime minister, Mendes- France, and me. I had a working relationship with him, but didn't have the intimacy that I had with Senghor.

Q: During the Cuban missile crisis, the French gave us, through General de Gaulle very strong support. Did the French ambassador wade in there or not?

KAISER: I don't know. I never checked that out. Maybe de Gaulle waded in after Acheson saw him.

Q: Yes, a very well known story.

KAISER: A great story. "Never mind the pictures, if Kennedy says this is good enough for me." I can't I don't know whether there was any other price they put on it. I do know we prepared the memo and we gave it to him. Later that morning he called me and he said "You can tell Washington I won't allow the Russians to use the airport."

Q: While you were there was the Peace Corps in Senegal?

KAISER: I signed the deal on it.

Q: How did that work out?

KAISER: It worked out very well. When I signed the deal with Senghor, he said to me "You are not going to keep those young people here all through the hot season?" I said, "Sure they're here for a couple of." He said, "Come on, that's much too cruel." He said, "When I was a schoolboy my parents used to take me to France to cool off." Actually the schools in Senegal were closed from June to November, that was the bad period. I said, "Well, Mr. President, our American young people are very tough. They're survivors." Sergeant Shriver came.

Q: Kennedy's brother-in-law.

KAISER: He's not in good shape now. I made it my business to visit every Peace Corps guy. The weekend before they left Senegal I went up in the northern part of the country to see the last of the Peace Corps. One or two of them got sick and my wife took them into the, I was worried they were all going to get sick, because she took them into the residence and nursed them back to health. It was a successful program.

Q: How about AID? How did that work?

KAISER: We did pretty well. Food for Peace was the main source, but we gave some additional aid as well and Kennedy, - when he saw Senghor I think I mentioned that before, Stu, - when he saw Senghor in Washington he opened up by saying, "I need your advice. Nkrumah is asking for a big chunk of aid to exploit these bauxite mines." By this time Nkrumah was flirting with Beijing and Moscow. "If I give him this aid," Kennedy said, "I won't be able to give you guys as much aid as you would like." I'll never forget it. Very touching. He said, "Monsieur President, j'ais connez tres bien. [He had need of a good psychiatrist]."

He went on to explain how he sabotaged - Senghor, when he visited Ghana - he saw to it that he didn't get to the scheduled meeting of the students on time. Then he said to Kennedy, "You've got to give it to him. Your policy is, if you're sure he's genuinely neutral, you've got to give it to him otherwise I and my colleagues in Africa will never understand." We did very well. I went back, that's right, we cut the aid and the State Department said "If you want to fight about this to get the cut back, come to Washington and talk to the AID people." So I had a meeting with the AID people. I guess it was [Bell] and his African guy. I made some general remark about Africa and this guy, I remember this very well, he tried to put me down. "What do you know about Africa and the AID situation?" I said, "I don't know about the AID situation in all of Africa, but I know more about the situation in Senegal and Mauritania than you know about this situation and I'm here to talk about what we need in Senegal and Mauritania." That shut him up and I think I got my aid restored.

Q: You mentioned a story about Roosevelt in Dakar.

KAISER: On one occasion he was invited to The Gambia, which was British territory. That was part of my domain. There was a governor there. The governor invited him to take a trip on his yacht. There is a river there. And he went along. He picked up a fever. He never recovered from that fever. That fever plagued him to the end of his life. I was aware of this story at this time and when I called on the governor, which I did a couple of times a year, he would always invite me to take a few days down the river on his yacht, and I always managed to have an excuse not to go so I never went down there.

Q: You left in 1964. How did the assassination of President Kennedy hit Senegal?

KAISER: Terrible, just terrible. I was on home leave and I got word that I better cut it short. The president felt that I ought to be there. Senghor didn't come to the funeral. I thought he was going to come, but he didn't. But he invited me and my wife to a private dinner in the presidential palace. That had never happened. I never did that before. Just the two of us. We talked about Kennedy and that's when he made his statement, "We got our independence 20 years too soon.

I think I told you I got worms, I got dysentery and I got TB in Africa.

Q: Oh boy. When you left in 1964 it was still the high time for Africa. Mennen Williams was the Assistant Secretary and there seemed to be a group of what I call true believers in Africa as the wave of the future. But there were a good number of professionals, it was still early days, but having considerable doubts about whither Africa. How did you feel?

KAISER: That's a good question. I had a very positive feeling not necessarily about Africa in general, but about Senegal. I had this whole Mauritania experience. We should go into that, too. I was ambassador to Mauritania, too.

I had a positive feeling because of Senghor, because of the level of Senegalese I'd met. There were some very extraordinary corps of young Senegalese who had been educated in Africa. There were some very competent people in the government. Senegal was the pet of France. I had a really, I shouldn't say distorted, but I had a feeling about Africa based mainly on Senegal, quite different from Mauritania, which was very positive and hopeful and peaceful. They had a possible coup, but they had a level of competence in their top people which was quite exceptional compared to other African countries. Africa as a whole, it was Nkrumah. He came to visit Senegal, I won't tell you about that. I was most unimpressed by him. There was Ghana, which at that time was dubious. There was South Africa, which was a very bad situation. East Africa had all kinds of problems. It exploded. Amin was prime minister of Uganda. In other words, the picture was not entirely charming all over Africa. On the contrary. I guess what I'm saying is that Senegal was an exception, proved to be an exception. It was the first country to have entirely free elections and for 30 years, 40 years there was, other than that one crisis, no political crisis. This was after the CIA guy briefing me in 1961 said to me, in front of Allen Dulles by the way, "Ambassador, Senghor will be out in six months." Senghor left in 1980 I think. That was a pretty good assessment, wasn't it? (Laughs)

Q: What about your relations with G. Mennen Williams, Soapy Williams?

KAISER: It was very good. Poor Soapy, he made very little impression in Washington. As a consequence, he came to Africa regularly. He must have visited Africa at least four, possibly five or six times. And the last time, Stu, was the weekend before I was leaving Senegal permanently. He came to call on me. I was packing up.

Q: Not exactly a good time. Did you get the feeling from him that he had an overly rosy view of Africa?

KAISER: It was a positive view. He loved taking these trips as I've just indicated because he got attention. He was not very effective. He wanted me to come back and become a deputy assistant secretary and the president asked me about it, Kennedy. I said I wasn't interested. He said, "I appreciate the fact that you're not interested."

Q: Let's talk about Mauritania, particularly the relationship to Morocco since you were going there. What was going on?

KAISER: Entirely different. Mauritania is a country in terms of area bigger than Texas with a total population of about a million people. Not recognized by Morocco. Very interesting. When I saw the president before going out - Kennedy used to see his ambassadors - he said, he talked in shorthand, "You got a problem in Mongolia." I was embarrassed. I said, "Mr. President, I'm going to Mauritania." He said, "I know where you're going. You're going to Mauritania, but Mauritania is involved in a crisis now that relates to Mongolia," and he was right. The crisis was getting Mauritania a membership in the United Nations. Morocco was blocking it. The issue became resolvable on a deal under which we would agree, I think this is right, to admitting Outer Mongolia. If you would be willing to admit Mauritania. The African countries all told at that time were very actively supporting Mauritania and they wanted us to agree not to veto Outer Mongolia.

Q: Because it was a Soviet satellite.

KAISER: The Chinese - we didn't recognize Beijing at that time, we recognized Chiang Kai-shek China - were against accepting Outer Mongolia and we had to vote against China being recognized. China was a permanent member of the Security Council. Wasn't that right?

Q: Yes.

KAISER: So, it took a lot of pressure to get that configuration. Kennedy was all in favor of working this thing out. The 12 Francophone African countries threatened to do something, I can't remember, counter to our interests unless we got Mauritania in there. Mauritania had been centuries ago, before the imperial period, a part of Morocco. The president was also a French product. He was a French lawyer married to a French girl. He was a nice guy. His name was Mokhtar Ould Daddah. He had problems. He had a black population on the border of Senegal. The most educated sector of his population, although a minority, the official language of the country was French. The spoken language of the majority was Arabic. So there was real tension. The majority of the people wanted to change the official language because most of the jobs worthwhile were government jobs and they didn't know French. There was tension that exploded several years after I left.

I visited Mauritania. I had a French friend who was running the biggest project in Mauritania. It was a company exploiting the development and production of iron ore. They discovered in the middle of the Sahara Desert a mountain of high-class iron ore. In order to develop it, they got the biggest loan from the World Bank ever given to an African country. This friend of mine, Jean Audibert, ran an international company, American, but mostly European to develop and exploit, to produce, to bring iron ore to the market. In order to do so he had to build the 300 kilometer railroad from the mountain of iron ore to the port. Big, major project. I would go to visit Nouakchott every six months, get up at 5:00 in the morning and take the goddamn airplane. He was a family friend who would stay with us in Dakar. He used to fly from Paris to Dakar and then drive up to Mauritania, Nouakchott. He said, "You've got to go see this project. You're ambassador." So I did. He picked me up in Nouakchott and flew me to the desert. We landed in the desert and were picked up by his car and driven to where they were laying the railroad tracks.

The temperature was 127 degrees Fahrenheit. I watched for about 45 minutes. Audibert was a lovely guy, a marvelous guy. My son is writing about him right now. He said, "Philippe, you've been a good boy and now we've got 35 more kilometers and there's a wonderful lunch waiting for you." Well I had to head back and I drove 40 kilometers to where the plane landed and no road, just over the African terrain. I said to myself, "You're finished if you go 35 and back 75 you've had it." I noticed a cluster of metal huts about a mile away. I said, "What's that over there?" He said, "Oh, that's where the French technical engineers and so on live." I said, "Can't we have lunch there?" He said, "Yes, but they're not expecting us." I said, "Americans are very informal." So, we drove there. And the first thing I noticed, in the middle of the Sahara, was air conditioning. We walk into this sort of like a diner, completely climatiseï¿½, air-conditioned. Stu, it was a half an hour and there was a bar there, and in a half an hour we had a first class French meal. Soup, entrecï¿½te, all the cheeses, I remember, fruit, wine, Evian. So I said, "Jean, what the hell were we going to eat?" "Oh," he said, "you missed caviar, you missed lobster."

An interesting thing was the way Mokhtar and Senghor used to talk to me about each other.

Q: Were you supposed to carry messages back and forth?

KAISER: They just sort of complained about each other. It is called the Islamic Republic of Mauritania and it's the only Islamic country that - except for Egypt and Jordan, they recognize Israel, too -

Q: Well, now, did you find yourself, let me put it diplomatically, in a pissing contest with our ambassador in Rabat? Because our ambassador in Rabat tends to be the captive of the king there. There is a tension there.

KAISER: I don't know. I didn't have much to do with it.

Q: Today is the 5th of August, 2005. We're going to talk about Mauritania.

KAISER: Mauritania is a big chunk of land bigger than Texas in square miles. A large part of it is desert. The least of the West African countries borders on its north of Senegal divided by the Senegalese River and interestingly enough the country, the blacks in that area divided between Senegal and Mauritania. The blacks in Mauritania were intellectually the dominant group. Mauritania is a country of the Moors, who were Arab, but kind of special Arab. This was a source of great tension, the fact that French was the official language of the government and the Moors all spoke Arabic. Because the blacks in that region were relatively well educated, they held the majority of the positions in the civil service in the government which is the major source of employment and the cause of great resentment on the part of the dominant sector of the population. In fact, later on, I talked to the president about the problem, the tension between the two groups on some occasions, but he was overly relaxed about it and later on after I left, several years after, there were great riots. There were a lot of casualties. Arabic became the official language of the country.

I want to tell you about the time that I got a visit for the prime minister, Mokhtar Ould Daddah, to the president, to Kennedy. Of course he was thrilled. I came to Washington before he did, and prior to his visit Kennedy had me in his living quarters in the White House to brief him. There wasn't too much to tell him. He said, "No problems between us?" I said, "Yes, there's one problem. Pan American has just put on a new flight. They had one in West Africa and now they had a new one from New York to Lisbon to Morocco, and from Morocco to Guinea. The most direct way to Guinea was across the great landmass of Mauritania, the most efficient way. However, Morocco did not recognize at that time the existence of Mauritania. Also they landed at Portugal, which was still undemocratic. It was a dictatorship. So Mokhtar Ould Daddah, to show what a tough guy he was, what a defender he was of the democratic cause, but mainly because of his anger toward Morocco, denied Pan Am the use of the air space. They had to go all the way around, it cost tens of thousands of dollars extra in order to make that round trip without using Mauritania.

I could see the president (laughs) was a little reluctant to raise this issue with him. I said to him - this is a self-serving story - I said to him, "Mr. President, I know the way to handle this. Don't raise it. Don't raise it during his formal visit. On the way back to New York, when I take him back on the plane and we have to pick up the flight back to Africa, he will I'm sure tell me how much he enjoyed meeting with you. I will say to him 'Yes, because you were his visitor he treated you in the best Arab tradition. He did not raise an issue of contention between our two countries.' He'll say, 'What's that?'"

[beginning of Tape 4 side two]

- my man in Nouakchott to go see the foreign minister the next morning. And, the impact of Kennedy was such that before Eagleton in Nouakchott called up the foreign minister, the foreign minister called him and told him to come in and say we're lifting the ban.

Now, go back to the meeting itself. We were given one hour for the meeting and quickly rapport was established. I remember what impressed the president, that he had balanced his budget without any special aid for that purpose. Well, they got to talking for two hours, Kennedy and the African president, on all kinds of issues, advice, and discussion. He just charmed the pants off this character. That's why what I just described worked so well.

I'm going to backtrack a little bit on myself. The phrase I used for the president during the briefing was, "Give him the Arab treatment." He said, "What's the Arab treatment?" You never bring up any subject that's embarrassing to the guest. He said, "Ambassador, that's a great idea."

Waiting outside of the president's office was. Kenny O'Donnell, the Boston Irishman; he was a leading political advisor, really a hard-nosed political guy. When I came out with him, I got a dirty look. He had a delegation from Illinois waiting to see the president, purely political meeting. As I walked out all he could say was, with real bite in his voice, "How many votes are there in Mauritania?" I had a good relationship with him in any case, but that sealed the relationship. After I left he was removed in a military coup. Ironically enough a coup was taking place in Mauritania just this past week.

Q: Well, then you left Senegal in 1964, and then what?

KAISER: And then went to London as the minister. I think my appointment might have made some of the Foreign Service people a little unhappy because I was not technically a Foreign Service, I'd never become official Foreign Service and this was a plum spot, one of the choice spots of the whole Foreign Service. I had met Bruce. I had some business with him when he was Undersecretary of State.

Q: Bruce was the ambassador?

KAISER: Yes, he became that, but at one point he was Undersecretary of State. I had met him before and then, on home leave, I served on the promotion board with him. Class one to career minister. I had gotten to know him and also, by the way, I should mention, I really got to know him when I was commuting to Geneva. I always stopped in Paris. First he was head of the Marshall Plan and then he was ambassador and we became good friends. We hit it off very well. I always visited him in Paris. But the longest period of contact was during the promotion board. At one point - this gives you an idea of the quality of the guy - I was surprised to myself, I was a little rough with him. He was pushing two people in the embassy who weren't ready to be career ministers. I said, "David, I appreciate your desire to push your people, but so and so and so are really not ready to be career ministers." He backed away after that. Well, Rusk and I were very good friends.

Q: This is Dean Rusk, the Secretary of State.

KAISER: The Secretary of State. Going back to the Truman days when we were both assistant secretaries and I worked very closely with him on all matters related to labor. We worked together on the Marshall Plan and all kinds of things. He was a Rhodes Scholar, too; he came from a very modest background.

Q: Oh yes, Georgia.

KAISER: I'll tell you about that later, about him and LBJ. He liked the idea and knew about my contacts with all these Labor characters, Labor politicians and how I knew them all from Oxford days and we were friends going down through the years. Bruce wanted a new DCM, a new minister, and he recommended me. So, that's how I got to London.

Q: You were there from when to when?

KAISER: '64 to '69.

Q: Five years.

KAISER: Great years. Bruce was a delightful character and he was getting on and how shall I say this immodestly? He really let me run the day to day administration of the embassy.

Q: Well, that's what a good ambassador should do.

KAISER: Every now and then I would take in a cable for him to approve. I initialed off the substantive cables. We would have a talk every morning after the traffic came in, after he had a chance to read the traffic of the day, and we developed a very satisfactory relationship. The best way to summarize it was, we had a common bathroom. We did not have a common outer office. We had separate outer offices that were next to each other and in-between our two offices in the back was a corridor which led to the back doors of both offices, so that we would see each other if we didn't want to go through. But also, we had this common john to use. About a week before he left - I stayed on for a few more months - we both opened the door to go to the john together and he said to me, "After you, Mr. Minister." And I said to him, "After you, Mr. Ambassador." I let him use it and I went back to the office. When he got through he opened up my door and he said to me, "Phil, I just realized that in the five years that you've been here this is the first conflict we've had."

Q: Well, tell me, what was the political situation in Great Britain when you arrived there in or '64? What were the issues?

KAISER: Well, the issues were big. It was the first labor government since'51. The first labor government in 13 years.

Q: Was this Wilson ?

KAISER: Wilson. Tragically, Hugh Gaitskell had died. I knew Wilson slightly. I knew Gaitskell much better. Gaitskell was a very good friend. It was a matter of the petering out of the Labor hierarchy beginning with Winston Churchill. Eden came a cropper in the Suez crisis and Harold Macmillan. He was in for seven or eight years, a long period. Wilson won the election with a majority of four. The relationship at that time was very close. We kept intimate contact on all the great issues of the day mainly relating to the Cold War.

Q: The Labor Party at that time had this extreme left, almost a communist element, anti-nuclear, anti-U.S.?

KAISER: The most immediate thing was, anti-Vietnam. There was a civilized left, moderate left, there were a few maybe five or six, ten at the most I would guess, who were extreme left. Wilson carried water on both shoulders very effectively. He was himself before he became prime minister more in the left than the other groups. Gaitskell was really more moderate than Wilson and Wilson carried water on both shoulders pretty effectively. We kept in very close touch although LBJ really didn't like Wilson. Wilson was too smart, too intellectual for him. The best way I can describe in one story the intimacy of the relationship - I can give you many examples - was when Wilson visited Johnson, he would come back and prepare a memorandum for his cabinet on what took place at the visit. He would send copies of that memorandum to us, to Bruce. Often we heard nothing from Washington on what took place. I think that's the best way to describe how close we were. Wilson would ask Bruce for advice on some of his own problems. But anything to do with America, he wouldn't move without talking to Bruce about it.

Q: Were we concerned at the time with something that was known at one point as the English or British sickness. In other words the Labor ability to -

KAISER: Solve their economic problems.

Q: To make Britain a rather ineffective industrial state.

KAISER: We were concerned about the status of the pound. Wilson devalued the pound in that period. That was a matter of deep concern, but we rallied behind him on that occasion and showed ourselves to be true allies. Rusk was very proud of that fact. He drafted the cable himself that Johnson sent to Wilson after Wilson devalued. We didn't like the idea of the devaluation because we feared its impact would be negative on our economy, but we were very good allies. We tried to the extent possible to help them improve their economy, and it took a little doing because you had a Labor government and we had a Democratic regime here, but there was enough in common to maintain a special relationship in that period.

For example, when war broke out between India and Pakistan, I got a phone call from Rusk at midnight I guess it was, our time; it was 7:00 Washington. He didn't realize that. Bruce was away, I was chargï¿½. He said, "We've just made the following statement about the war. Can you get Wilson to do the same?" I said, "Dean, it's 12:00 here. I'll see what I can do." He said, "Well, there's a war going on and you see if you -." One of the private secretaries to the foreign minister was a classmate of mine from Oxford, Murray MacLehose, was an expert on China and Hong Kong. Fortunately he didn't mind my bothering him at midnight. And he said, "Don't your people realize that its midnight? The prime minister will make a statement the first thing tomorrow morning." Which is an example of the intimacy of the relationship.

Q: Did you get any feel about the relationship between Wilson and LBJ?

KAISER: Not very good. Wilson wanted desperately to develop an intimate relationship with LBJ. They just didn't mix. He never came to London. LBJ never did. After there'd been something that had led to a, deterioration is too strong a word, led to a cooling off, I don't remember what the incident was, in the relationship between LBJ and Wilson, and the provocateur was really LBJ, and he came to realize it. So, to make up for it, he invited Wilson to visit Washington and gave him a big dinner, I don't think it was at the White House, and made a speech that I became aware of at 12:00 at night. It just so happened we were up that night sitting in the second floor reading or something when the phone rang, my phone. to be used only on official calls. It was my old classmate Ted Heath, the leader of the opposition, full of anger. He was leader of the opposition then. He said, "Phil, I'm going to blast your president tomorrow morning." I said, "Ted, what are you talking about?" He said, "I just learned that he made a speech at the dinner he gave to Wilson so praising that he compared Wilson favorably with Winston Churchill. That's a little too much." I said, "Look, Ted, hold your guns, let's get the text of the speech and then we'll go from there." I tried to get Rusk, I couldn't get him, so I got George Ball.

Q: The Undersecretary at the time.

KAISER: I told him what was going on. He said, "Stop them from blasting him." I said, "Look, we'll do the best we can, but send the text of the speech." The following morning the text came; it wasn't quite as bad, but [laughs] it was pretty bad. I had to send it to Heath. When he read it he called me up and he said, "See what I mean?" I said, "Look, Ted, let me talk to you as an old friend, unofficially just on an old friend basis. You're probably going to be prime minister while LBJ is president. Compared to LBJ, elephants suffer from amnesia. When Alec Hume was prime minister he visited Washington and we were having a disagreement, you were exporting buses or trucks to Cuba and we objected, but you continued to do so. While he was in the White House after he had visited LBJ. he was talking to the press Alec Hume criticized us, the U.S. for its narrow attitude. LBJ never again communicated with Alec Hume. If you criticize him, you will never be able to develop a relationship." The next morning, the Sunday press, this was Saturday night, said some leaders of the Tory party were unhappy with some of the things LBJ said in his speech. There was no personal attack. It was a wonderful example of where a personal friendship paid off.

Q: Also, people directly under leaders. or potential leaders. can cut out some of the stuff that can later, smooth things over because much of this the problem can be because of pique and has nothing to do with substance.

KAISER: MacLehose reminds me of another time. We used each other's experts. There was nobody in our government, and we appreciated it, that was a expert on China and Hong Kong than Murray. He later became governor of Hong Kong. He was a dour Scotsman. I was the only guy who had a rapport with him, because we were classmates at Oxford. I would from time to time get a cable from Washington, this was an example, saying, "Would you get MacLehose s view on A, B, C, D?" This is what you call a special relationship. It wasn't only MacLehose, but that was a dramatic example.

He did not come. LBJ wanted to come to Churchill's funeral but, you remember, he had an emergency operation and he didn't send - SOB - he didn't send Hubert Humphrey, he sent Chief Justice Earl Warren. Everybody in England wanted to know, "Who is Earl Warren?" Humphrey was very popular with the labor government. Very popular.

Q: Eisenhower went, but he went on his own.

KAISER: I don't think Eisenhower ever visited. He came for the funeral.

Q: You were saying something about Dean Rusk and LBJ about coming from modest homes?

KAISER: On one of those Dean Rusk visits to London, this is typical David Bruce, knowing about my relationship he'd send me out because he knew that Rusk would appreciate it instead of going himself to meet Rusk. He had a little cold, too. Rusk's first question was, "When was the last time you've been to visit at Oxford?" Fortunately I had been invited to dinner at All Souls, and he began to reminisce about his days at Oxford. He went to Davidson College. He said, "I've had a continuing argument with the president about who came from a more modest background." So very smartly I said, "Well, this is how to settle it. Visit where you were born, and visit where he was born." He said, "Impractical advice, Phil; the cottage in which I was born has long since been torn down." Interesting that he should tell me about the fact.

Q: They kept him on which was sort of surprising during the Vietnam War. Did you and David Bruce have concerns about the Vietnam War?

KAISER: Oh, yeah.

Q: You're throwing your eyes up in the air.

KAISER: The American government sent a special envoy to England to tell the British government that we were about to expand our military activity in Vietnam dramatically.

Q: Around '64 or '65.

KAISER: Who was this guy from the CIA? He was in the State Department, too. I can't remember his name. It will come to me. He brought with him a chart in which he had outlined in red the parts of the country which were in the hands of the enemy. And he produced that chart, when Bruce and I went over to the foreign office to make the presentation to the foreign secretary and my friend Dennis Healey, the minister of defense, my classmate. They did a pretty good job. When he left, Bruce and I almost said simultaneously to each other, "Did you notice how much red there was on that map?" Large chunks. Then we had a visit of somebody who had been deputy, had a top role in Vietnam, and was assigned to Algeria or Morocco, I can't remember his name, a Foreign Service guy.

Q: It wasn't Henry Task?

KAISER: It was a good Anglo-Saxon name. En route he stopped off in London and briefed us. He tried to convey the impression that things were improving, but unbelievably, I guess, he threw out the phrase, "It's become unsafe to walk at night in certain areas, but we think we're controlling it in Vietnam." I remember.

Wilson was very loyal to LBJ on Vietnam at some political expense to him. Because if you took a vote in the Labor Party, a majority would be opposed to our policy. On one occasion, this is the immodest Phil Kaiser, when Kosygin, was visiting London and Wilson told Washington to use that occasion to see what he could do about Vietnam. We gave him some statement on what our position, what we would be prepared to negotiate an agreement with Saigon, what our position was. We changed it in the middle of Kosygin's visit. It was a friendly visit. He stayed for about 10 days. We changed our position in the middle of the week; we made it tougher. The British told us - they were tapping his phone at Claridges Hotel - at one stage he said, "The American proposal has some merit to it, pass it on to Saigon." Well, the fact of the matter is that Kosygin knew that he was being tapped. So the value of the tap - people forget that - is thereby diminished.

Q: It can be used for your own purposes. I was in Yugoslavia for five years and we used to play this game, get messages out.

KAISER: I always thought when you go to these countries you should be briefed on how to use a phone that you know is being tapped.

Well, the negotiation ended without a conclusion to the frustration of all. This was something Bruce handled all himself. It was very interesting. He got an account at the end of every day and then he would send a long cable. The only one who saw the cable was myself. He headed off on a holiday after the official. Kosygin stayed on for a while. We had this crisis about Kosygin. It was during the Tet truce, we weren't bombing and we were going to resume bombing while he was still in London. So, with all due immodesty, I went to Bruce. I said, "Look, this is ridiculous. This guy has negated in good faith, he's going back Monday, why can't they resume bombing on Tuesday?" We had trouble; we had bombed Hanoi when he was in Hanoi. We went to work on that, that's another story. We called up people, I called a few and he called a few, I said, "Why don't you send one of your cables attention to the president," and he did, and that did the trick. That's the whole story, or part of the story.

We finally agreed not to bomb after his cable went out. We felt pretty good about that. He went off on a holiday and Kosygin left. He landed in Moscow at noon and bombing was resumed at 2:00 in the afternoon. Wilson made a statement about the visit and it was a very decent statement, very fair. Washington didn't like the statement. I got a blistering telegram, drafted no doubt by my old contemporary Walt Rostow. We had adjoining rooms in Oxford. "Go in, tell the prime minister, blah, blah, that he shouldn't have made the statement, so on and so forth." I said, "Phooey," I just decided not to do anything about it. Fortunately (laughs) he left the following day for a trip to Germany so I had an excuse. I had no intention.

Q: Yes, well, this is a problem sometimes we have in foreign policy if people, one or two steps down, want to get tough and show, let's put it diplomatically, they've got balls. It doesn't help. Diplomats are there to take care of these matters.

KAISER: I was chargï¿½. I got a cable from Washington saying that Ne Win, the top man in Burma, was in London. During the old imperial days. They used to go to London to get a physical checkup and have a holiday. We and Peking, the Chinese, were wooing assiduously, vigorously, Burma. I get this cable, which says the following: "Ne Win is now in London. Seek him out and tell him his mortal enemy who has threatened to kill him has succeeded in emigrating to Washington, to the United States." In spite of general instructions we all got to the contrary not to give him a visa, the embassy in Paris did. "Go seek out Ne Win." That's the instruction to me. "Tell him that his mortal enemy by mistake has reached the United States, but tell him," - he'd been invited, he was on his way to Washington, "tell him we're going to find him and isolate him and there will be no threat to him. But also explain to him that under American law we can't immediately deport him."

So, I call up the ambassador and I take along our expert, he later became ambassador to Burma. I tell the story and the ambassador says, "Oh, come on, you don't expect us to believe that Paris did this by mistake, do you?" The prime minister says, "Anything can happen in Paris." Just like that. He turns to me and he says, "How would you like some Burmese tea?" I said, "I'd love some." He gives me a dissertation on the medicinal values of Burmese tea. Everything is hunky dory, and he says he'd be glad to accept the invitation. I said, "Tell him that I look forward to seeing him and explain to him that the president is going to give a dinner for him and he needs to wear formal clothes." I passed this on, and the ambassador comes back to me and he says, "The prime minister will not wear formal clothes. He will wear his regular clothes when he comes to Washington." I went back to Washington, I didn't mess around, I said in my cable, "You have a choice to make: you can't have him in formal clothes, but you can have him in whatever he wants to wear." Period. So, they said "Okay, let him come." There was no formal dinner. There was a stag dinner, a dozen people and LBJ loved it, loved the stag dinner. I decided not -

Q: Some battles are just not worth fighting.

KAISER: It was the responsibility of people on the spot to have the courage to do that.

Q: Today is the 26th of August, 2005. The Humphrey visit: what would you like to talk about there?

KAISER: The Humphrey visit was long overdue.

Q: He was vice president at that point.

KAISER: He was vice president. I don't know whether I mentioned earlier that at the Winston Churchill, LBJ wanted to come, see, but he had that emergency operation. It was right after his inauguration. In that mean-spirited way of his, he didn't send Hubert who was Vice President, the logical guy to go was Hubert. But he didn't want Hubert to get all that play and he may also have been aware of the fact that Hubert was very popular with the British government. Because it was a Labor government and the Labor people were great admirers of Hubert. So, for all those good reasons (laughs) he didn't send Hubert. Instead, Stu, I don't know whether you know this, but it apparently turned out that protocol-wise the vice president is not number two in Washington. The chief justice of the United States Supreme Court. He sent the former governor of California, Earl Warren, and when that was announced the British people said to me, "Who is Earl Warren?" All my friends and people kept saying, "Who is Earl Warren?" This is now several years later, Hubert finally comes as vice president.

I must be very frank with you, we were very old friends, and he was coming into very favorable territory. But he was very strung up, very tense, nervous and so on, until we got to one of the main events of the visit. He was going to be in the House of Commons during the famous question period when the prime minister has to spend an hour answering provocative questions from different members. After an hour of that, we adjourned to the biggest conference room in the House of Commons where Hubert spoke to the members of parliament. It was chaired by the lord chancellor which was protocol-wise the appropriate person because the lord chancellor was the chairman of the House of Lords, just like the vice president is chairman of the United States Senate. It's a five-minute walk from the actual house where they meet to the committee room. Hubert says to me, I'm walking with him, he says, "Phil, what should I tell these people?" I said, "You mean you don't have a prepared speech?" He said, "No, I have no prepared speech." So I said, "Why don't you tell him what the Johnson-Humphrey administration has done domestically for the American people. They don't know about this. The only thing they know about is Vietnam." He says, "Well that's a pretty good idea." He gets up and gives a perfect, unbelievably perfect, speech without a second's hesitation. Superbly delivered and articulated. And, not too long.

Q: He was renowned for running off at the mouth.

KAISER: His wife was reported to have said to him, it's very famous, "Hubert, for a speech to be immortal, it doesn't have to be eternal." Then came the question period. He was superb, very very good. He was very bright.

Q: One of the brightest stars around.

KAISER: We then come to the last question, the chairman says, one more question. There's still other people, so in typical Hubert fashion he says, "Well, I'll answer an additional question." The next character gets up is a little left wing son of a gun, and I knew we were in for a little rough ride. He raises the question of Vietnam. And Hubert mistakenly, my fault, I hadn't briefed him about it, compares the situation to Munich, and he's barracked by the audience. The idea of comparing Vietnam. Fortunately it didn't really spoil the total impact of the speech. And I must confess, Tony Lewis who at that time was the New York Times bureau chief in London -

Q: Anthony Lewis, yes.

KAISER: - called me up about it and I told him about the big success. I didn't mention the other thing, which shows you how everything that's in the newspaper, the New York Times covers everything that happens. I didn't tell him about Hubert being barracked, II sort of protected him. Well, the meetings all together went very well and the last meeting was in 10 Downing Street. We saw the prime minister, but this was sort of the wrap up meeting with the prime minister and there were six of us. There was the prime minister, the foreign minister and Dennis Healey, the defense minister, and there was Hubert, David Bruce and myself. It was lunch at 10 Downing Street. Business had been covered quite adequately in the preceding two months, so this became a kind of a social gathering. We gossiped and so on, and at one point the question of corruption in government came up. We were comparing corruption between England, between local government in both countries, and I come up forgetting for the moment that Wilson the prime minister was a Liverpudlian, somebody who comes from Liverpool. I said that Dennis Brogan, who was the great American historian and was a good friend, I tell him how when I was a student at our little meeting with Dennis some English student had just returned from a visit to America. He wanted to impress Brogan by all the things he saw. His impressions were very favorable except, for the local corruption in a fair number of cities in America. So, Dennis said, "If you want to see what urban corruption is really like, let me take you to Glasgow or Liverpool some weekend." Wilson, who was a very nice guy, said, "Well, you know, Dennis was right." So we got to comparing corruption between Minneapolis and Liverpool. A little game between Humphrey and Wilson. Interestingly I remember the two main stories of quintessential corruption in Minneapolis when he became mayor. The police department was completely corrupt. That was one of the issues in his campaign. He said, "I called up Hoover and I said -

Q: The head of the FBI.

KAISER: - I said Mr. Hoover, I've just been elected mayor. As you know my police department is corrupt. Would you do me a favor of telling me which officers in that department are honorable and moral so I can pick from them a new chief of police. Hoover said, 'Let me have a day or two.' Two days later he called back and he said to me, 'Mr. Mayor, O'Reilly in your police department is the only one that's not corrupt.'" This was Hubert's story. Wilson's story: during the war in 1941 when everything from a toothpick, everything was presumably being converted to arms for the battle for war. He recalled some guy not only getting his certificate to build a new public house, but also having no trouble getting the material to build it in 1941. They loved him. The Labor people loved him. And I suppose, I don't know, I should tell you this story. I walked with him, to the plane when he left and I said to him, "Hubert, you did a great job and everybody was pleased, and heard comments from your Labor friends, from Wilson," and so on and so forth. He said, "Well, I'm very grateful, but will you tell the ambassador that I would appreciate it very much if he would tell the president what you just told me?" Pretty sad.

Q: It really is.

KAISER: He treated him terribly, and I'll tell you a story, too about that. I did, I went to Bruce and Bruce said, "I've already taken care of that." I'm sure it was true. That's the kind of guy Bruce was. A kind of a postscript. That night I was invited to dinner in the House of Commons by a Labor MP, a friend of mine. I don't remember who it was, it could have been Heath, one of my friends anyhow, and on the way in I ran into one of Wilson's cabinet members, I can't remember the name, a very nice guy and he stopped me very warmly. He was of course present at some of these events with Hubert and we got to talking about nice guys. So, I said, "Let me tell you a Humphrey nice guy story."

I told him the story of my going up to the Hill and having lunch with Humphrey when he was a senator in the height of the McCarthy period. As we're walking into the senate dining room McCarthy walks out. They almost fall on each other's shoulders. "Hello, Hubert, Hello, Joe" like two lost brothers meeting each other after a long absence. I give Hubert a dirty look and he says quick as a flash, "Phil, the sons of bitches you have to be nice to when you go belong to this club." At that moment Ian Paisley walked by (laughs) and he my host greeted each other very warmly. So, he says to me, "You see Phil, that's the way it is in the House of Commons, too. Just like in the United States Senate." Well, I think I can tell you another sad story. I saw Hubert after he retired from office and was in London. I was talking about Lyndon and I said to him, "Hubert, when you and Johnson were in the senate did you call yourselves by first name?" "Oh, of course," he said, "I called him Lyndon and he called me Hubert, of course." I said, "When you were vice president and he was president, did you call him Lyndon?" He said, "Are you out of your mind Phil? I called him Mr. President." Kind of sad.

Q: Well, a fine man.

KAISER: I told you he wrote me a letter the day before he died. Apologizing for two reasons and he listed two reasons. He asked me to do him a favor and I did it, and interestingly enough, "I never congratulated you for the job you did in getting the crown returned to the Hungarians." This was written the day before he died.

Q: Oh my God. Well, what was your impression particularly of the British French relationship while you were in London?

KAISER: Well, Wilson decided to apply for membership in the EU.

Q: It was then I guess the European Community.

KAISER: As part of his idea how of to stimulate the British economy. De Gaulle turned him down, vetoed him. I saw Wilson the day after, for some reason I was over there, and he was trying hard to, he had the official turndown and he extracted one or two sentences from it to suggest that the situation was not hopeless. He was just deluding himself. There was no great feeling between De Gaulle and Wilson. The relationship was, I wouldn't say cool, but it wasn't warm, it was proper. It was a proper relationship and the turndown, rejection, did not enhance the relationship. Heath had tried to negotiate to join the European Community when he was a minister in Macmillan's government, and he was turned down, just absolutely turned down. And, my friend Ted Heath, very complicated, some very good obits about him, I visited on R&R London just at that time and I was in the embassy staff meeting with Bruce the day after he returned from the failed negotiation. He was back in London, Heath was, and everybody wanted to see him, including Bruce, to get the story of what had happened.

While I was in that meeting, Bruce's secretary came in and said, "Ambassador Kaiser, Mr. Heath just called and asked if you could come over and have tea with him in his offices." I didn't show my feelings openly, I don't think my feelings of gratitude at that particular moment, but it obviously made an enormous impression. He was not a particularly warm person, Heath, interestingly, but we were friends and always had been friends. I had pretty good relations with the French ambassador and his minister. The deputy foreign minister, a very close friend, after going to a meeting in Paris of the Western European Union or whatever it was called, came back. We had lunch and at the time there was some book about the assassination of Kennedy. He said, "I had lunch with my French colleague," my British friend said to me, "and he said to me, 'Isn't it extraordinary how Johnson organized the assassination of Kennedy so he could become president?' So, I said to this fellow, 'You don't believe this do you?' " He said, "Well, the result of my being skeptical about this was his feeling that I was an innocent, that I didn't know how things happened in the real world." Oh, he also told me - I held back for 24 hours on a really very important piece of information - that de Gaulle was going to stand with the Ibos in the civil war in Nigeria. I thought this was absolutely incredible, but it turned out to be true.

Q: They were sending in supplies in from Dakar.

KAISER: I reported in the cable, I said, "Thompson told me that."

Q: You know, in a way its forgotten, but de Gaulle was almost playing the part of Omar Qadhafi in stirring up trouble.

KAISER: Remember, he came to Montreal?

Q: Oh, yes, "viva Quebec libre."

KAISER: He was a mixed bag. He was very important during the war and after. He did some great things in the community and his rapprochement with Germany and Adenauer was extraordinary.

Q: I mean it was basically laying the foundation on which essentially our foreign policy rested and has rested until practically this president.

KAISER: Until this administration.

Q: Yes.

KAISER: Did you read Gary Hart's piece yesterday?

Q: No, I didn't.

KAISER: Oh, you ought to read it. Is it yesterday's or the day before, it's the lead column. Be sure you read it. Particularly in light of what you just said.

Q: Well, let's talk a bit about the '67 War between Israel, Syria, Jordan and Egypt. You were there at the time.

KAISER: I'm trying to remember, was Heath prime minister then? I think so.

Q: The Suez Canal was blocked in the '67 War and that caused a lot of consternation and problems.

KAISER: Wilson was quite friendly to Israel. In fact he had a son who spent six months there as a student. What I remember in particular, Stu, were the cables that were being sent from our embassies in the Arab countries and from what's Wally Barber in Israel. A very strange character who was there as long as Sam Lewis.

Q: These were two men who pretty well covered the period.

KAISER: Truth compels me to tell the story, I think I've told you the wonderful quote of Aristotle the first time he criticized Plato. I can almost tell it in Greek. He said, "I hesitate to criticize my master. But one must honor the truth." Our ambassadors in the Arab countries almost all predicted there was going to be a disaster for Israel as an analysis. Wally Barber sent a cable to Washington. I think it was one paragraph, two at the most, sort of no nonsense, "The Israelis are going to win this war handsomely." That was the substance of his message. There was a lot of activity. We reported on what the British were doing or not doing.

Other than that, there was of course a lot of great curiosity, great anxiety, but the general feeling was that the Israelis would get an awful licking. They never cashed in. The real tragedy, the number one tragedy in the Middle East; the Israel Palestine thing in my view, is that they never cashed in on that victory. They didn't follow the advice of Ben Gurion who was in retirement who said give back the land for peace. The story was, the little king wanted to negotiate immediately and the Israeli government, who was the prime minister, was it Golda? I don't think it was Golda, and the Israelis said we're not interested. We want word from Egypt from Nasser not from Hussein.

Q: King Hussein of Jordan.

KAISER: There was no Palestine and there was no West Bank which was part of Jordan and that could easily have become, they could have handled it in such a way that the PLO would never have arisen.

Q: You know, you look at great turning points, and there was one. When did you leave London?

KAISER: Oh, I didn't leave London for a long time. I stayed on with Annenberg as chairman of Encyclopedia Britannica. I went private.

Q: What did this involve?

KAISER: It involved running this company. I didn't particularly enjoy it, but it was a position. I didn't push for a - remember Congressman Hayes?

Q: Yes, Will Hayes of Ohio.

KAISER: That terror of the State Department? He was very friendly to me for some reason or other and he wanted me to go into the Service. There had been a law of lateral entrance that I could have done, and I decided against it, and I lived on in London privately until Carter got elected. I was involved in the Carter campaign. How did that happen? I was active in Democrats Abroad which I'd initiated in London. We had quite a group, and in that capacity I was on the top committee, I was sent to represent Democrats Abroad on the platform committee of the Democratic Party as part of the pre-convention platform committee. I was made co-chairman of the subcommittee on foreign affairs in drafting.

Q: This would have been '76?

KAISER: '76. Interestingly enough, there was a little bit of New York State politics involved. The first person named to chair the foreign relations committee was a supporter of Bella Abzug. At that time there was a big primary fight between Bella Abzug, remember that character?

Q: Oh, yes, with the big polka dot hats?

KAISER: - and Pat Moynihan for the nomination to the United States Senate. This is an immodest story. And the person at first picked to head up the foreign affairs subcommittee was a supporter of Abzug, so the Moynihan people strenuously objected, and I became an accepted co-chairman. I had as a co-chairman an African American congresswoman from California. I can't remember her name, but our picture was together in both the Washington Post and the New York Times. I had a big day, one of these rare days in life, I suppose. On one day my son working on the Post had a front page story, my son at that time working at the New York Timea job which he foolishly gave uhad a front page story and my photograph with this co-chair was in both of the newspapers. That was an interesting experience, drafting foreign affairs.

Q: Where was Bella Abzug on foreign affairs at that time? She was sort of way off into, she was certainly anti-war.

KAISER: She was anti-war, right. She was pretty left wing. She was - let me be diplomatic -substantially left of center. That's a pretty good phrase isn't it? (Laughs)

Q: Yes. I just thought of somebody who was a rather extreme conservative as saying right of Attila the Hun, that's how they described it. She was left of Lenin.

KAISER: So, this is important, that's how I got to know the Carter people, by virtue of the contacts that I made. Some of them like Stu Eisenstadt who was very close to Carter, you know, and who else? Oh, I knew Cy Vance.

Q: Well, he was part of the establishment, but Carter really came out of, well he came out of Georgia, out of nowhere. I mean you'd been dealing with the Humphreys, the Javits, the people who had been sort of running the -.

KAISER: Jackson.

Q: Scoop Jackson.

KAISER: Scoop was a character. If Scoop had been elected I could have named any post I wanted.

Q: What was your initial impression of the Carter entourage?

KAISER: One or two people in that group that I got to know pretty well, but the important guy was Cy Vance. I went to the convention which nominated Carter and I remember his opening sentence and his acceptance which was, "I'm Jimmy Carter and I'm running for President of the United States," and it brought the house down because that was the line he used throughout the campaign, see? I met Carter a couple of times, but he was a pretty cool cucumber. I mean there was nothing, although I had a very good connection during the struggle to get the crown back.

Q: Did you play any role in the campaign?

KAISER: His campaign? In Democrats Abroad. For the first time people realize that there was substantial vote abroad and we got some satisfaction, we improved, I think, the procedure for people abroad which enabled, made it easier for people abroad to vote.

Q: Today is September 2nd, 2005. You had left being DCM in London and for a while you were working for the Encyclopedia Britannica and then you got once again involved in politics, didn't you?

KAISER: I was involved with almost the formation, certainly the early years, of what was now become quite a movement in both parties. I was involved with Democrats Abroad and several of us helped set it up and got it going. The objective was to make it possible for citizens abroad to vote in the national elections. The Republicans set up their own equivalent. We did succeed in devising procedures that made voting possible; in fact, feasible. We were given the right to participate as delegates to the conventions and as members of the platform committee.

Q: Which convention was this?

KAISER: I was on the platform committee for the convention that nominated Jimmy Carter in '76.

Q: Did you get any feel for Jimmy Carter at that time? Early on he had been the Governor of Georgia.

KAISER: What I found interesting was that he was catching on outside of Georgia, outside of the South. Interesting, Stu, that a big step forward was when he won the New Hampshire primary, his first big, kind of the takeoff, see? What people forget, I think I'm right when I tell you, that he won that primary with a total of 23,000 votes. He won it because there were three or four opponents in the contest and one of the guys that didn't get into the contest that should have was my friend Scoop Jackson. Scoop at that time was the leading candidate. Scoop Jackson won in the Massachusetts primary, but the big turnaround which was very impressive was in Pennsylvania, which was a heavily trade union state and labor was very powerful. Scoop Jackson had always been a favorite of labor.

Q: Scoop Jackson had been senator in Washington the state of Washington.

KAISER: When I was assistant, I became very good friends with Scoop when he was a congressman and I took him and arranged for him to get his first assignment abroad to participate in a committee meeting of a branch of the International Labor Organization. We went to Europe together. It was the first time I flew with him. I had raised for him, as assistant secretary of labor, the largest amount of money that labor had ever given to a senate campaign. He had never forgotten that.

Q: How did you ascribe Jackson's loss in Pennsylvania? What happened?

KAISER: It's very interesting. I can't answer your question with any degree of substantive significance. It's puzzling to me. Just puzzling to me that he didn't take on, and the Carter people did such a good job. It's a very good question and I can't give you a satisfactory answer because I remain to this day puzzled by that fact.

Q: How did you view Carter? As I recall he's obviously coming from Georgia and being a naval officer, this was not a great international experience, but he was a member of - what was it - the Trilateral Commission? He had some interest in foreign affairs, didn't he?

KAISER: The great thing was, he was a student of Rickover. He had a tie with Admiral Rickover.

Q: Rickover was a one theme person and that was the nuclear navy.

KAISER: Yes, but Carter had some involvement in that.

Q: Yes, well, he was one of his officers and Rickover was very possessive of his officers.

KAISER: I think that may have been a substantial factor in Carter's favor. Remember, the Cold War was still very much in play, and I think that background of Carter's, the naval academy, specialist in the nuclear armed submarines and so on, I think that was very helpful in his campaign.

Q: Were you concerned, and some of your colleagues, about this man running for president who had no discernible experience in foreign affairs?

KAISER: You always assume that a military person who reaches a certain level does have some experience in foreign affairs. The nuclear submarine, he must have been conscious of the Cold War and our struggle with the Soviets and so on. I tell you what did stand out, now that we're talking about it: his racial attitudes. He was the first southern governor to take a liberal position on that subject. He made a wonderful statement in his inaugural address as Governor of Georgia about the need for dealing creatively and positively with the racial issue. We had to be very frank and honest about it and we had to do away with segregation. It was very important I think, very important, in his success in some of the northern states. Remember, Pennsylvania, for example, a large black vote.

Q: Particularly in the Philadelphia area.

KAISER: In fact, I think that enabled him to take off as a candidate for the United States president as a southern governor.

Q: A burning issue of course was the Panama Canal treaty, recognition of Red China, and eventually Carter and the Camp David process. These were sort of the high marks of his administration, but were these subjects of the platform?

KAISER: I think we probably took some position on those questions, but I can't remember. Did we deal with the Panama Canal? I think we did. We'd have to look at the platform.

Q: What did you do during the campaign?

KAISER: During the campaign, I worked on getting people to vote, to register and to take advantage of some of the progress we had made in terms of developing the procedure that people abroad to vote for national elections.

Q: How did that work?

KAISER: It worked pretty well. We did pretty well. We raised some money, too in England and there were Americans who were not poor who were willing to contribute. I did get to know in the course of platform committee meetings some of the key Carter people, particularly Stu Eisenstadt, and we became friends and we've been very good friends since.

Q: Carter is elected in November of 1976 and then what happened as far as you were concerned?

KAISER: Somehow or other I must have expressed a desire to come back here in a diplomatic way. After all, I had the experience.

Q: Senegal and the UK.

KAISER: And Mauritania. Cy Vance knew me. I made it clear that I was interested in an ambassadorial post and I got a call offering me Hungary. I had expressed a desire for Yugoslavia, but fortunately for me, they picked Hungary. Yugoslavia became a mess and Hungary became very interesting, particularly in relation to the Cold War. Christopher called me.

Q: The undersecretary. By the way, since he came from the area where you had drawn your initial strength, Wisconsin and Minnesota, did you have any experience with Walter Mondale at all?

KAISER: I knew Mondale. I knew him. I had an experience with him later when I was in Hungary. But I didn't go directly to him; I used Humphrey as my agent.

Q: Did you have any trouble getting confirmed for Hungary?

KAISER: I had a great historic connection with Claiborne Powell. Powell's father was Minister to Hungary for FDthere weren't so many ambassadors. Powell's father, as Powell pointed out to me, presented the paper telling the Hungarians that we were at war with Hungary in World War II. Then there was Jack Javits on the committee who was a friend of mine. I had no trouble at all.

Q: You were in Hungary from '77 to '80. What was the situation in Hungary?

KAISER: Very, very interesting and significant. Hungary had emerged by then from the terrible tragedy of the '56 revolution and the guy who'd been the traitor in the '56 election, Janos Kadar, who had been originally part of the revolution, but then the communists very cleverland the guy who played a key role was the Soviet ambassador to Budapest at that time, Andropov, the guy who later became for a short period of time

Q: Head of the KGB and then premiere of the Soviet Union.

KAISER: He moved over to the Soviet side, and for quite a while became the complete agent of Moscow. That meant he became involved in a series of terrible repressive acts. I won't go into detail; very bad, very bad indeed. Then he began to emerge from that background to a more liberal posture, much more relaxed and very interested in liberating the economy. He introduced something called the NEM, the New Economic Movement. When I got there within a period of relatively relaxed atmosphere and we had adjusted several difficult problems we had, conflicts with Hungary including the paying off of a loan I think going back to World War I. It was a period when Kadar had decided to move, to the extent he was able to, toward the West.

Q: When you presented your credentials, did Kadar intimate that "let's see what we can do"?

KAISER: Oh, yes. There were two big issues. There was the return of the crown of St. Stephen and there was Most Favored Nation treatment. They were desperate for MFN. They were developing trade. They were developing relations with Germany, he had already visited Germany, with France and he was clearly, compared to Czechoslovakia and Poland, the most relaxed, the most liberal of the communist-controlled countries in central Europe. I think he had visited Bonn and a large number of East Germans used to come to holiday in Lake Balaton in Hungary which is a very attractive area. In fact it was the vacation spot of all of Eastern Europe. We had reached a stage in the relationship where Hungarians could say, "Look it's time for you to return the crown of St. Stephen and for you to give us the Most Favored Nation treatment." I picked up the ball on both of them: two very important substantive issues in the relationship between the two countries which were capable of being adequately, satisfactorily adjusted. After getting briefed and reading as much background as I possibly could, I decidel don't want to sound too self-servinit was going to be the objective of my ambassadorship to get satisfaction on both these issues.

Q: Now, was there a quid pro quo, in other words, "We can do this, Hungarians, but what are you going to do for us?"

KAISER: This was all part of Carter's policy to loosen the grip that Moscow had on these characters, in Poland, Hungary, and Yugoslavia, too. I have written this up in considerable detail in my memoir. My friend Jackson was very interested in getting one country in Eastern Europe that met the conditions that made MFN possible. At the moment it was only relating to the Soviet Union, because you remember what the key to MFN was: that you allowed exit visas freely. You allowed people to exit your country without any obstruction. This was the key. Also there was no restriction on trade. You were allowed free trade.

Q: Was this the Jackson Vanik Amendment?

KAISER: Right. And I got Jackson on my side and I said to him, I knew him well enough to do this, I said, "Scoop, if you support the return of the crown we'll have a better chance to get them to comply with NEM, to comply with the provisions," and he said, "Okay, you can count on me."

Q: His assistant at that time was Richard Perle? I can't see him making any compromise with any communist government. Was he a factor at all?

KAISER: He was no problem. He was smart enough to appreciate that I had a very special relationship with Scoop and I could deal with him. I never went through any of his staff. I think I mentioned this before, I could call Scoop from anywhere in the world and I would get a response from him within 24 hours. His loyalty to me was complete. I never had any friendship like that with a senator..

Q: Could you explain what the issue of the crown of St. Stephen was?

KAISER: St. Stephen was a crown given to the first king of Hungary 1,000 years ago as a token of a newly established independence as a state. It had always been the symbol of Hungarian national identity, and Carter understood that. A symbol that had loomed large and significantly in the history of the country over several centuries. Whenever there was a new king, he was crowned with the crown, and it had a religious quality, too. It was housed in the cathedral in Budapest. It was removed from Budapest by individuals who were afraid that they would be taken over by the communists, that they would get a hold of it and take it to the Soviet Union. They moved it to Germany and buried it in Germany. But before I forget, before I lose it, I suddenly recall the fact that on a visit I took to a northern city in Hungary with - which was very unusual - a minister, the finance minister, we visited the church where apparently the crown had been hidden in the Napoleonic period. American soldiers uncovered it in Germany and sent it to Fort Knox, and that's where it had been since the end of the war.

Q: It had become a conflict hadn't it? We weren't going to give it up because they had these ungodly communists and you had Cardinal Mindszenty being held prisoner.

KAISER: It was, vigorously, it was violently opposed by the Hungarian American population, particularly those who had reached here, immigrated to America, after the '56 revolution. They were located mainly in important political states, Illinois, Pennsylvania, Michigan. Its return was vigorously opposed by the majority of these people. The worst problem I had was a congresswoman from Cleveland who represented a large Hungarian American constituency.

But, Stu, two very significant people approved it. Two guys in that community won the last freely elected, freely chosen before the communists took over as prime minister of Hungary. He escaped to America and he testified. This became the subject before the foreign relations committee and he testified in favor of returning the crown. The other guy who was the commanding general, I can't remember his name. He was commander of the forces resisting the Soviets when they invaded Hungary in '56, and he said the crown should be returned for the same reason that the president was in favor of it. The arguments were very clear: if you gave it you reinforced or reincarnated or revived the sense of national identity that goes far beyond the Soviet experience, and in that sense weakened the tie with Moscow. It's true, by the way. The other side said, if you give it back you make legitimate the Soviet occupation.

It took quite a bit of doing here. Carter was very interested. Cy pushed it. Carter asked for a memorandum on how to handle it, how to proceed. Hubert got word to Mondale to push in its favor in talks with the president, and he assured me that Mondale had done that. Humphrey was amazing. When I called on him, as one did with all the members of the foreign affairs committee, I practically wasn't in the door when he said, "What are you going to do about returning the crown of St. Stephen?" I had no idea that he even knew about it. He knew more about more subjects than any senator in the United States. Carter finally decided to do it, and, it was resisted by Brzezinski to the very end.

Q: Brzezinski had his agenda which was Polish anti-Russian and he gave no flexibility there.

KAISER: We got word from Cy, this was in September while we were all here for the UN meeting, that he was going to see the next week the Hungarian foreign minister and tell him that we were going to return the crown. He said, "Would you like to come?" I said, "Yes, I would love to be there." So, I flew in, arrived in New York. That afternoon before the morning meeting that Cy was going to have, I called up George Mercer who was then Assistant Secretary and I said, "Is it all set?" He said, "I think we've got it all ready." Cy had a deal with the president that every day he would send a memorandum to the president on issues, listed issues that he wanted a presidential decision on. The guys in New York, Christopher, was taking over that task and he put that item high on the agenda for the president to see tonight. "We expect no problem, you should check in tomorrow morning" and I checked in the morning and they got an okay from Carter for Cy to go ahead and tell the foreign minister that we were going to approve the return. He told me, this was the next morning, "There were calls from Brzezinski, he said 'hold this up'". I said, "I'm very sorry, we've got presidential approval to go ahead." Cy told the secretary. He still tried very hard, tried to get the Vatican into the picture. We had to frustrate that effort, and we did. The cardinal of Hungary was a very good friend and he was actively in support of returning the crown. And, we had a delegation, Lee Hamilton and Senator Stevenson, Adlai's son, Missouri senator, headed up the delegation. We had one more gimmick so to speak: that this was not a political return, it wasn't the government returning, it was the American people returning it to the Hungarian people.

I got a request. "Could you possibly see to it that Kadar is not present at the ceremony of the return." (Laughs) I got the Hungarian government to approve Kadar's absence at the ceremony. We moved the crown to the parliament the day after the mission arrived. I had a special plan. They were going to arrive at midnight, we were waiting, because they were stopping over at a military airport in northern England, for a two-hour stopover. I said "Ridiculous, they can gas you up in half an hour." I got very official about this, very stubborn and ambassadorial. That's what happened. They arrived about 9 o'clock, and there was a delegation, Hungarian, waiting to receive them, and it was quite a ceremony the next day in the parliament when Cy handed over the crown.

Q: Were there Soviet troops in Hungary at the time?

KAISER: There were still Soviet troops.

Q: Because I was wondering if there was any effort to get them to move out?

KAISER: That didn't happen until the collapse of the Cold War and also the overthrow of the Communist party in Moscow.

It was a wonderful atmosphere. We laid down the conditions that any Hungarian who wanted to visit the crown had to be allowed to come in and leave. The crown had to be placed in an appropriate place like the national museum. At a critical moment, by the way - a little self-serving item, but true. It's a good ambassadorial story. There was one common goal on the details of the agreement. In one stage fairly early, I had instructions from Washington stipulating certain conditions that the Hungarians had to meet before we agreed to send the crown back. I went to see the deputy foreign minister who dealt with the western world. He looked at the conditions and he said that he would have to get the approval of the authorities, the politburo so to speak, before he could give his okay. So he called me up two days later and asked me to come over, and he said that the authorities wanted to change A, B, C and so on. I said, "If I send that back to Washington, you can forget about getting the crown back. Give me a piece of paper and I'll draft for you the cable I'd like to send back to Washington." He said, "Well, let me take this up again." 24 hours later, he said "You can send that cable." That was the last obstacle we ever had.

Q: What was the public reaction, what sort of ceremony was there?

KAISER: It was a beautiful ceremony and with a great Hungarian humor. A cute story got that got around implied that to offset the impact of our return of the crown, the Soviets had sent a train full of watches to return to the Hungarian people. (Laughs) One of the frightful things that Hungarians were very pissed off about was the fact that when the Soviets took over, the one thing that that they chose were the watches of individual Hungarians. None of them had watches.

The Hungarians were very much, very anxious about getting MFN. This was all part of a liberal economic policy that Kadar had launched. It had a real impact on the economy although when push came to shove, when the issue became political control of the economy, he reverted to the old method. However, the economists, I got to know quite a few of them actually, several of them who were on the academy of science who were allowed quite a bit of leeway in their thinking and what they wrote and so on. Of course, they wanted MFN. When Cy Vance came for the ceremony, giving back the crown which was beautifully done as I think I told you the big people to people, very well carried out, he had a meeting with, not Kadar, but the top guy, the nominal prime minister, and they agreed, Cy and he, that the next big step in the relationship was MFN.

The big problem of MFN was freely allowing people to emigrate if they so desired. I'm going to be a little immodest. Let me just say this. We discovered in the Helsinki Accord a phrase which stipulated that if you signed this accord you agreed to allow people to emigrate from your country. We used that clause. The Hungarians had signed that agreement as fulfilling the requirement. Several months after, Tip O'Neill, the speaker, came with a congressional delegation and visited the country. They were received by Kadar. I told Tip, we were very good friends, I told him to ask him explicitly that question, "Did they allow Hungarian Jews who wanted to emigrate to Israel for example, to get a visa to go, to be permitted to leave?" So he very categorically said "Yes. There was no bloc, no inhibition." And he said, "There's a favorite story we like to tell relating to this matter, the story of a Hungarian Jew" - he called him "Mr. Schwartz", I remembe"who had relatives in Israel. He came and applied for a visa. And he got the visa. And he went to Israel with his relatives. And after he had stayed in Israel for a little less than a year he felt he wanted to go back to Hungary where he had lived and been born and lived and he felt more comfortable. So, he went back to Hungary. Then a year or two later he repeated the same process. His relatives pulled him towards Israel, he took a visa to Israel, and then he came back again. After the second time, one of his friends said, 'Mr. Schwartz you've had a very interesting experience.' He repeated the fact that he went to Israel he came back, he went to Israel and he came back. 'Tell me frankly, which place do you like better?' and Mr. Schwartz said, 'Frankly I like it best in-between.'"

By the way at that same time Congressman Tom Foley was with the mission. He later succeeded Tip O'Neill and at my suggestion he asked Kadar about his idea about the economy, and Kadar gave an incredible statement, so much so that Foley wrote me a note and said, "This is the best explanation of a free economy that I've heard in a long time." So we used - to get back - the Helsinki provision as indicating that Hungary was meeting the obligations.

Q: You were ambassador to Hungary from when to when?

KAISER: '78 to '80.

Q: Did you notice in the streets of Budapest a change in the economy?

KAISER: Stores were open. There were goods to be bought. Another joke - the two favorite stores where people would line up in the morning in front of the store before it opened: one was a bakery which knew how to bake country bread, bread that people ate as kids in the country before coming to Budapest; the other was a kind of a drugstore which claimed it had a cure for bald heads and knew how to grow back hair. There were shops., there was no visible shortage. It turned out actually subsequently, they borrowed billions of dollars from abroad, theoretically to modernize the economy and the chief banker, his name was Fekety, and we became very good friends, who generated these funds, was very popular with the central bankers all over the world. When the head of the Bank of England whom I knew heard that I was going to Budapest he told me about Fekety, what a remarkable character he was. It turned out later, they misled the lenders. Instead of using the money for restructuring the economy, it was used mainly to raise the standard of living, to maintain a reasonable standard for the majority of the population. Later on, when democracy was restored, communism was undone, they had an opportunity to do what the Poles did, i.e., to renege, to work out a deal with their lenders so that a good deal of the debt was forgiven. The Hungarians refused to do that and paid a big heavy price literally and figuratively by paying back every dollar they had borrowed.

Q: Were we interested solely in the plight of Hungarian Jews getting out of Hungary? What about Hungarian citizens who wanted to get out?

KAISER: They began traveling over Europe. I think they got pretty relaxed. We had the deal remember that insisted that any Hungarian living outside who wanted to come to Hungary in order to see the crown had to be allowed into the country.

Q: How about the 1956ers, were they coming back, too?

KAISER: Some of them were coming back. I think I mentioned before, one guy came back and traveled all around the country. He had lived through the terrible, when Kadar was at his worst, and he said, "I'm afraid I would have to admit if there was a free election today Kadar would win the election." He left when Kadar was the most villainous person in the country. There were 56ers that did come back. I don't think in very large numbers.

Q: What in your analysis in your country teams' analysis brought about the change in Kadar?

KAISER: That's a good question. I think maybe it was a reversion. In the beginning he was very much against the Russians and he was in favor, he belonged to the liberal group that opposed the Russians. They turned it around after the invasion and he decided to become their stooge, but then I guess he reverted back to his earlier days and, the best you could say was, the intimate involvement with the Soviet Union was a fall from grace so to speak. It was not his basic attitude and feeling and that's why he started the NEM and that's why he began developing relations outside the country. I think by the time I was there he had visited Germany, he had visited France. I suppose we could say he got religion.

Q: It's hard to say a nation or group of people have certain characteristics, but actually they do. I was wondering, I don't know the Hungarians, but would you say being a small country in Europe they were extreme realists, in other words, who's on top, seeing which way the tides of history are going?

KAISER: Well, that might have been a factor. I'm amused when you say a small country. They used to say to me, the foreign minister or the deputy foreign minister, "We're a small country," and I would say, "There are at least 10 countries in Europe that," are smaller than you are and I'd list them all. Then I'd say, "You're a medium-sized country."

To give you a sign of change. There was a guy, what the hell was his name? A Hungarian economist, brilliant, Hungarian Jewish, who immigrated to England. He succeeded John Keynes at Kings College at Cambridge. Brilliant. The name will come back to me. He came to visit. He had a niece in Hungary and I knew him. I invited him to stay with us, which he was delighted to do. That's interesting to begin with, that he stayed with the American ambassador. There was a colleague of his who was the architect, the original articulator of the NEM, the New Economic Mechanism.

Q: Like NEP, the old Leninist New Economic Policy.

KAISER: That's right. And he wasn't quite in disgrace, but something was going wrong. My guest told me he was going to have lunch or drinks with him. I said, "Invite him to dinner." He came back and said he couldn't come to dinner because there was a procedure. To dinner at the American ambassador, you had to get official permission and there wasn't enough time. A year later that scene was replicated. A year later. He was in from London and he brought the guy back for dinner. That rule was no longer operative. An indication of how the atmosphere had been changing. The economists cultivated the hell out of me. Two of them, for example, took me to all these outfits. I don't know whether you know that under the communist regime, each sector had its own summer resort, a place for vacation. The academy of science had a very fancy one and two of them took me. A long ways from Budapest, beautiful setting, a beautiful place. I even was entertained by the finance minister which was really impossible a year or so before. The atmosphere was evolving and changing.

Q: How did the Most Favored Nations treaty situation go during your time? Was it approved by the Senate?

KAISER: It was approved, but I don't know what the procedure was for approval. I don't know what the actual detailed procedure was under Jackson-Vanik. We were given MFN and there was an inflow, a fair number of American businesses sent representatives to survey the scene and to see what possibilities there were. Now, there were one or two companies that had been exporting. There was one big company, electric, one of the biggest electric companies in Europe, which General Electric bought after the collapse of communism. Stole really, bought for a pittance. They provided a good deal of the electrical equipment for General Motors and Ford in Europe. Then they had a big engineering company up in the southern part of the country, very good modern engineering company. The manager was a real go-getter who was tough. He was called not the red czar, but the red manager or something, and he provided sophisticated items to the European branches of the American automobile companies.

Q: During this period East Germany was touted as being the great economic power within the Soviet bloc, but it turned out that the stuff they were producing was pretty lousy. At the time you were there how did we view Hungary, were they turning out better quality goods?

KAISER: The Americans were satisfied with the quality of goods. They were very good companies. The electrical company was the most powerful electrical equipment in Europe between the two wars. It was a Swedish company and this was a major branch. After the collapse of communist Hungary the Austrians moved in and bought that electrical company for a very modest sum and then GE moved in and bought it and paid the Austrians, what was still very underpriced. GE's done quite a job there. It's a major part of the Hungarian industrial recovery.

Q: Were you getting reports that the Hungarians were producing, at least in some sectors equipment that was competitive with the West, because most of the Soviet Union including the bloc, including East Germany, really weren't competitive.

KAISER: The stuff they were sending apparently was of adequate quality. I think that was clearly the fact.

Q: You were saying that the Hungarians expected great benefit for the Most Favored Nations.

KAISER: Not while I was there. I haven't checked in recent months, but quite substantial amount of trade. The target was 100 million in my day. Which used to be a lot of money.

Q: I was just wondering, you were watching, your political section was watching, other parts of the embassy were watching you might say the body politic within Hungary. Were you seeing this economic freedom, was this having an effect on the political dynamics within the country?

KAISER: It certainly affected the general atmosphere. A freer economy inevitably influences the character of the political scene making it freer and more relaxed. There was an ongoing process of freeing more and more of the economy. I was the only diplomat that the head of the trade union movement received because of my labor background. : After the crown returned, I was a very popular guy. No ambassador in a communist dominated country had an easier and happier time than I had subsequently. He received me, and he happened to be at that time the head of the World Federation of Trade Unions.

Q: Which we had avoided.

KAISER: It was a communist doctrine. That was the one the CIO was a member of, and left after it opposed the Marshall Plan. I had a cozy talk with him. At that time the AFL had walked out of the International Labor Organization. I think so, or was it the, well it must have been the ILO, and he said to me "Why don't you talk to Mr. Meany and tell him to bring" - this was a communist guy - "to bring the AFL back, the AFL-CIO back. We need him back here as a member of the ILO." That was the general sort of atmosphere at the time.

Now, I think I should use this point to run a little head of the game, but relevantly. The democratization of Hungary, in contrast to what happened in East Germany and Poland and Czechoslovakia, where it was a revolt in all those places. The transition in Hungary was peaceful and organized, which was very significant. The transition was organized by a nominally communist government. It all started with the return of the crown - the whole change in the atmosphere, which the return dramatically contributed to. You got a peaceful overthrow of Kadar, a younger communist ruler, more liberal. One of them, for example, a key guy who was fascinated at what was going on from Scandinavia by the social democrats and the major turning point in the Cold War was in the '80s when East Germans.

Q: I think it was '89, early in '89.

KAISER: Before the war a year or so before when the East Germans holidayed in Hungary in Lake Balaton which is a very attractive area which a lot of East Germans used to come to, wanted to return not back to East Germany, but to West Germany and to do the Hungarian government had to allow them to cross into Austria. And in spite of pressure from Moscow, pressure from East Berlin, they opened up the borders of East Germany who were holidaying in Lake Balaton. This was a major early step to what ended in the collapse and the breakdown of the Berlin Wall. Very significant. And all this can be traced with the changing atmosphere, which was given a big stimulus by the return of the crown. And Carter: later on he got some credit for it, but not enough credit. That was a major thing he did. It took a lot of guts to do what he did.

Q: Did Carter in his campaign of '76 mention returning the crown? Did he seem familiar with the issue?

KAISER: Oh, yes, very much so and when Cy broached it for him the first time - I mention it in my memoir - he asked for a scenario to deal with the issue and we did that.

Q: What was your relationship or the relationship of the Soviet Embassy in Budapest while you were there because I think this would be a very tricky situation.

KAISER: Interesting question. I had a relationship (laughs) with the Soviet ambassador. It was minimal, but respectable. He had a group of stooges, the ambassadors from all the satellite countries. So we, I and the British, organized a sort of group of Western ambassadors and we would meet once a month. We had in our embassy a secure room, and they had in their embassy, a secure room. We discussed freely our views of what was going on, exchanged views of what was going on.

I'm laughing for two reasons. The last meeting became a party. We got hamburgers and hot dogs, we cooked them. The Soviet ambassador and all the stooges were sitting around. At one point I took a tray for everybody and brought it over. This stunned the Hungarians (sic), to see the American ambassador personally bringing over all this. He was the dean of the corps, which was the case in all communist countries. Like the French, in Senegal; the dean was a French ambassador. The procedure was to meet with him. So, we talked quite frankly and he wanted to know, he was kind of delighted when I told him my father had some Russian background. "Oh, when did he arrive in America?" I told him 1905 or '06. The day before I left, I gave a farewell party. Somehow or other during the ceremony this came up and somebody suggested that my father had immigrated to America later than that. And he spontaneously said, "No, it wasn't 1910, it was 1905." Everybody was impressed. The irony was that he gave the same identical speech to every departing ambassador. The only change he made was in the names. When two ambassadors were leaving at the same time he gave the same speeches for each one, changing the name.

Q: One of the indicators at least for a diplomat who served in the Eastern Bloc was the food, the restaurants and all that. The Hungarians of course have got great cooking. I love their cold cherry soup for example, but was there a good food supply and were restaurants flourishing when you were there?

KAISER: I don't like restaurants. My kids never forgave me for that. We didn't go out much because when we went out I made a big fuss about it. There was a little American flag, the violinist came out.

Q: I hate a violinist playing over me.

KAISER: There were good restaurants.

Q: Was there a good food supply? I say this because in Romania, under Ceausescu, they were selling off all their surplus food for cash and the people if not starving were in very bad straits.

KAISER: There was some, they had a deal with the community. Either they were trying to get the door widened for, agriculture was a major item for them. They were very good at agriculture. Either they succeeded in breaking the wall in the European Community or they were working on it, but agriculture was a major industry for them. I've never eaten anything like a white Hungarian peach, nothing could compare with it. Their tomatoes were wonderful, but their tomato juice was lousy, and I jokingly a big fuss about that, and when I came back years later they told me, "Taste our tomato juice now. I'm sure you'll like it better." We grew corn in our garden, but they had never seen that.

Q: They called it maize. It was food for cattle.

KAISER: When the corn had reached maturity, she asked the chef to go out and get some corn. He poured in all of the corn. He pulled out the whole crop and brought it into the kitchen, so we had to eat corn for two or three days. But the food was good. Yes, we had oranges and I think bananas, too. I don't think we suffered at all. There was no problem.

Q: What about relations with Romania?

KAISER: They were lousy. They weren't very good. Later on, when did they do a deal - they wanted to do a deal. Did they do a deal while I was there, did conditions improve? I can't tell you. I don't have any recollection.

Q: Was there concern about the Hungarian minority both in Yugoslavia and Voivodina?

KAISER: All over.

Q: I mean they had Hungarians.

KAISER: There were a couple of million auslanders. But big, in Romania.

Q: Yes.

KAISER: They never recovered from Trianon, the treaty that gave Transylvania to Romania.

Q: Did we make any effort to try to bring the Romanians or the Hungarians together, or was that their problem?

KAISER: No. I don't think we took any, I can't recall any particular initiative. I sent people to visit Transylvania to see what was going on there, and Rusk was interested in that, but I don't think we made any effort to ease the relationship. That came later.

Q: How about in the Voivodina in Yugoslavia, Nowy Sad and all that area? There were a sizable number of Hungarians there. Was this an issue?

KAISER: It was generally an issue, the question was, were they still citizens of Hungary or were they citizens of the country in which they were located?

Q: My impression is at least for most of the time the Hungarians were well treated in Yugoslavia. It wasn't a real problem there. How about with Austria?

KAISER: Relations with Austria are very good. I talked about K&K, Kadar and Kreisky, the Jewish prime minister under whom I served. It was a natural relationship because of the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

Q: I was wondering whether the Hungarians looked upon the Austrians as being their surrogate in the West in a way?

KAISER: Well, in a way. The Austrians used to drive into Hungary to fill their cars up with gasoline. It was cheaper I think in Hungary.

Q: In a communist country they usually kept the gas cheap.

KAISER: We used to go there and now it is a four-lane highway, it wasn't, in my time, between Budapest and Vienna. There was a good relationship. Of course the Austrians, there was a big influx of Hungarians after the '56 revolution. In the tens of thousands.

Q: Did the '56ers in Austria represent sort of a group looking for revenge or anything like that?

KAISER: I didn't have any sense of that. In Austria there was an anti-foreign movement, but on the other hand they hosted a lot of refugees, a large number of Hungarians, and they handled the immigration of Soviet Jews. Vienna was a very important passing point. And that they did very well. Kreisky had a big hassle with the Israelis. The Israelis wanted the Austrians to compel the immigrants to move to Israel, and Kreisky said they can go to wherever they want to go. And a fair number came to America. Quite different by the way, quite dramatically different. It's worth noting how the Americans treated the Soviet Jews who wanted to emigrate. Scoop Jackson, encouraged that emigration, pushed for it, facilitated it. The block was the Soviet government. In contrast to the way we behaved with the German Jews when Hitler came.

Q: Oh, yes.

KAISER: A terrible chapter.

Q: Well, we lived and learned. What about Czechoslovakia? It was going through a very repressive regime after the "Prague Spring" and all.

KAISER: They became the worst of all.

Q: What was the relationship between Czechoslovakia and Hungary while you were there?

KAISER: It was nothing special. The one thing I can think of is that the intellectuals whom I knew felt superior to the Czechs and were very proud, if you will, of the state of their communist society compared to particularly Czechoslovakia and Poland, but then Solidarity changed things.

Q: Yes, and of course it turned out to that the intellectual movement of Czechoslovakia with Havel became a major force.

KAISER: They were sweeping communists with their feet. It was a massive street demonstration. In East Germany the same thing. Like Hungary, which had its bloody '56 revolution.

Kadar, one of his chief weapons in dealing with Moscow was, "Would you like to see another 1956, or do you want to maintain a moderate relationship, a calm relationship?" He used that very cleverly. One of the interesting scenes of our experience with one of my diplomatic colleagues was when Brezhnev came at a critical moment to visit Hungary. The big question was, how would he react to the more liberal atmosphere in Hungary in contrast to Moscow? There was also the question of what kind of shape was he in. He was going from there to Vienna a week or 10 days later to meet with Jimmy Carter. I had word from Washington they wanted to get as much of a feel for what, it was already known that this was kind of sick and so on. It was very interesting.

He arrived, the Hungarian officials were a little embarrassed about the visit, and the plane landed and he got out of his plane and like an automaton, as if a button was pressed on the back of him and it moved him around in the line of ambassadors, and he couldn't say a word. Until he got, strangely enough, to I think the French military attachï¿½ and he exchanged a word or two. He was there for two days and he gave his approval to what the Hungarians were doing, and then we returned to the airport to say goodbye. Again, he marched through and was a little more human, and he stopped at me and he tried to say something. Gromyko was with him and he couldn't get it out so Gromyko said, in English of course, "Goodbye Mr. Ambassador."

When I (laughs) left the airport, in front of the airport was Kadar with his top people all clearly heaving with relief, and I made some wisecrack about it. I don't remember exactly what I said, but it was something to the equivalent I guess, "I can see why you guys look so relieved." They laughed, they took it well. I just reported to Washington and I gave as much detail as possible, that this was not a very vigorous guy in the prime of his life and so on. I gave them every detail I could remember. I thought it would be worth recording that.

Q: In your dealings with Hungarians, particularly Hungarian officials, was anybody taking you sort of aside and saying, "Look, Mr. Ambassador, we're on our way. Have patience, our country is changing and we're moving more towards" -

KAISER: They didn't do it as bluntly as that, but that was kind of the implication. They were doing interesting things and they let one or two ministers have a kind of personal relationship with me. Particularly the economics minister, who we did a deal with, the American Federal Reserve, some kind of deal. He was in Washington and I saw to it that he got royal treatment in Washington. He was a good guy and he became a good friend.

Q: Well, is there anything more we should cover on Hungary? You left there when? 78 or '79?

KAISER: Late '79.

Q: Then where did you go?

KAISER: Austria.

Q: You went to Austria as ambassador in '79, and this was not a great move.

KAISER: It's a great story. It was a big hit in Vienna and in Budapest. The cardinal of Hungary who was a good friend of mine and was very helpful during the critical days of the return of the crown decision, a very nice guy, a very good sense of humor. He stated publicly when it was announced I was going to Vienna, "This is an historic event. The first time in 1,000 years that Budapest is sending the Kaiser to Vienna instead of vice versa."

Q: How wonderful. We'll pick this up when the Kaiser from Budapest goes to Austria in 1979.

Today is the 11th of October, 2005. How long were you in Vienna?

KAISER: Not long, just under a year, I'd say about 10 months.

Q: What were American relations with Austria at the time?

KAISER: They were good. Austria had a very ambitious and bright chancellor, Kreisky was his name. Bruno Kreisky who to the amazement of the world, given Austria's terrible anti-Semitic history, particularly in more recent years, saying, I think with ample justification, that Austria was more Nazi than Germany.

Q: I've talked to people who were there not too long ago and they say it's very anti-Semitic.

KAISER: Kreisky was a Jew who had been elected chancellor, quite a remarkable thing. I try to explain it in my memoirs. He was bright, very bright as you would expect, and a very sophisticated politician. He had an international base, which he greatly exploited. There was the socialist international to which belonged all of the labor parties and socialist parties. It was chaired at that time by the president of Germany. I'll think of his name in a minute. Kreisky was chairman of its international committee, of the socialist international, so that gave him a world stage on which to play and he played it to the hilt. He took every opportunity to try to play a world figure role. He was a very interesting character. My first meeting with him was in an incredible office where Metternich used to stay, in the Ballhausplatz. It's about as long as from here to there.

Q: We're talking about maybe 50 feet or more. It's a big area.

KAISER: As he's walking up, he says, "I've gotten quite a few letters from friends of yours and friends of mine like Dennis Healey and Jim Callahan," and he named a lot of trade labor figures, "telling me what a wonderful guy you are. But I also got a letter from Kitty Hart. How do you know Kitty Hart?"

Q: Is this Kitty Carlisle? Very famous actress. Moss Hart's wife and she used to be quite a singer.

KAISER: Quite a gal, a wonderful gal. But that's what he wanted to know. He didn't want to know about anything else. Well, we hit it off. We had a very good relationship. I must confess that I spent very little time with the foreign minister. We were on a friendly basis, but he was not very significant in the government. The big operator internationally was Kreisky and actually on several occasions Hitler's time - not Hitler, that's an interesting slip! - he would act, he would serve as a center for meetings between American presidents and the Soviet leaders. That was neutral ground. Austria under the agreement.

Q: That was the 1954.

KAISER: '54. Under the agreement, which led to the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Austrian territory, the Austrian government had to commit itself to neutrality. That was again a role, but that was not to say that they couldn't have a democratic government, that wasn't proscribed, but they couldn't ally themselves for example with the Western world. But that was also special status that Kreisky exploited to the hilt. He had very good access to Eastern Europe.

And Vienna was the great spy center. You've got to remember Austria was more east than some parts of Czechoslovakia. We had a big, big intelligence operation which I nominally supervised. I did, dealing only with the station heads. I didn't bother to get into the details. I didn't think it was necessary. I had neither the time nor the inclination to get into the details. I did have very good working relationships with the top characters.

Now what happened in Austria of interest at the time was, the Socialist International had a mission to visit Iran at that particular time. When American foreign service officers were hostage. Among their own initiative they decided to make a visit. They being Kreisky, Olaf Palme, the prime minister of Sweden, and Felipe Gonzalez, the leader of the socialists in Spain who later became prime minister. The three of them went off to Teheran to see what they could do to ease the situation. Hopefully, it was a long shot, to get a reprieve or at least put in a plug for their liberation. He was very good at that. Some of our people came over to visit him. Assistant Secretary for Middle Eastern Affairs.

Q: Was that Hal Saunders?

KAISER: Saunders came over for a visit, and Kreisky came to my house, the ambassador's residence - he was very informal - to talk to him, and Saunders briefed him. Kreisky's whole mood was to be as helpful as possible and he was delighted to get Saunders briefing. When he came back he gave us a full report, and they had, before the top religious guy took over, they had a couple of civilians in the office who had ties with the International. Kreisky gave us a full account of the meetings he had with these people. The key members of which were subsequently removed when the religious types took over complete control, openly and hidden, complete control of the government. Although it was a noble effort it didn't achieve anything of consequence. I guess that was the most important thing really.

Another interesting thing was when there was a 25th anniversary of the liberation of the Mauthausen concentration camp. It was liberated by an American military unit and the man command at the time was still alive. He was a colonel then, but in retirement he was a general. Kreisky never invited me, but drove me. Sometimes he drove over alone to the residence. He was very informal. His name, his phone number is listed in the telephone book. He's an extraordinary politician. We drove to Mauthausen and we talked a little bit about the Nazis. Mauthausen was the cruelest camp of all, I don't know whether you know that. The reason was, the major reason was, there were a good many Jews were there, but it was a camp where they incarcerated the people who had been the underground resisting the Nazi occupation, of Greece, of Italy, of Yugoslavia. All those people who had been captured were incarcerated in Mauthausen. It was located in a quarry so you can imagine the opportunities for torture that this provided. They used them all. And this occasion, it was very interesting, they had survivors from Spain and Italy, Yugoslavia, Greece that were imprisoned.

I sat between Kreisky and the chairman of the International Committee of Mauthausen Survivors, named Sheppard. He was an Englishman who had flown over and flown into Europe on a special mission, which he fulfilled, but then was captured by the Nazis. As he was trying to return via Spain he was captured in the mountains between Spain and France, and they brought him to Mauthausen. They took us around some of the places where torture took place. Then he began to describe in detail some of the terrible things the Nazis did. He stopped after a few minutes. Very quiet and undramatic, soft spoken Englishman. He said, "Ambassador, why should I tell you or give you any more detail? Let me just tell you when I was here for a little over a year, fortunately they removed me to Dachau where I spent two years. Had I spent that two years here, and I don't want to be dramatic, but I'm sure I never would have survived." On the way back from Mauthausel'm trying to remember did he drive or did he have his chauffeur drive? I'm not sure. I'm thinking it was probably his chauffeur who drovKreisky had invited his communist cellmate to join us. He had been incarcerated twice.

Q: This is Kreisky?

KAISER: Yes. Once under the Dollfuss regime, you remember that was a fascist regime? In that incarceration his cellmates included a communist and a Nazi. The communist cellmate later became a social democrat. We drove back, nobody accompanying us, and we stopped at an inn to have lunch. It was interesting how the people there responded to him: with great dignity, delighted to have him there, and made no fuss until he left when they all got up and clapped their hands. He was very unselfconscious about it all.

The Nazi cellmate saved his life, because he was out of jail when the Nazis took over. This Nazi cellmate warned him that he was going to be picked up. So he escaped to Sweden where he spent the whole wartime. He came back and he revived the socialist party. He was a very clever and able political leader.

Q: How much from your observation had Austria faced up to its role in World War II?

KAISER: Not very good. Nothing like the way the Germans did. Austria was more Nazi than Germany. In fact, Wiesenthal, who just died -

Q: He was a Nazi hunter, Simon Wiesenthal.

KAISER: He had a stunning statistic, to wit: Austria made up 10% of the population of greater Germany, more than 50% of the administrative personnel in the concentration camps were Austrian. They were very bad on reparations and conceding how bad they had been compared to the Germans. Of course there was a famous picture of tens of thousands of people greeting Hitler after the Anschluss. I'm sure you've seen that picture. The biggest square in Vienna. It was absolutely, people were packed in like sardines. Douglas MacArthur, Jr., who at one time was ambassador to Austria, when Hitler took over Austria he was an officer in our embassy in Germany, in Bonn, and he was sent.

Q: It would have been Berlin at that time.

KAISER: You're right, it would have been Berlin. He was sent to Bonn after the division. He was sent informally to have a look at what was going on in Vienna. He was just appalled. About 48 hours after the Anschluss and he was appalled by what he saw at how obnoxious publicly they were mistreating the Jews.

Q: There's a story, I mean almost immediately they had elderly Jewish men scrubbing the sidewalks. I mean it was just awful.

KAISER: That's what he particularly recalled. He lived here in the apartment that his father-in-law had, and you know who his father-in-law was?

Q: Yes, Alben Barkley, the Vice President.

KAISER: Barkley lived here when he was Vice President. It was their home.

Q: I interviewed him here.

KAISER: Really?

Q: Yes, a long time ago, about 20 years ago.

KAISER: An interesting guy. Kreisky was very committed to the Third World during something about the Third World. There was a big conference in Mexico, a big international conference to deliberate about how conditions in the Third World could be significantly improved. He wanted to be sure that we attended, and he took himself very seriously, with some justification. I couldn't have asked for a better relationship.

Q: Was Austria at that time a place where Soviet Jews were coming out and going elsewhere?

KAISER: They did a very good job. You remember at the beginning they housed the Soviet Jews en route out into a castle which was attacked by Palestinian terrorists. I don't recall whether any lives were lost, but they changed the whole procedure and they had the Red Cross handle the inflow of the Soviet Jews. I visited a couple of times and they did a superb job, very well done. The facility was very up to date. The living quarters were very comfortable and it was all done extremely well. And Kreisky insistethe Israelis wanted the Austrians to leave the Soviet emigrants no choice but to immigrate to Israel. Kreisky said they could go to wherever they wanted to go. He made a big fetish, I'm glad we came to this, of developing relations with Arafat. He had very good personal relations with Arafat.

Q: Yasser Arafat was the head of the Palestinian Liberation Organization, the PLO.

KAISER: His reasoning was, there should be somebody in the West who had good working relations with Arafat to communicate with him. I remember once when we were talking about this, he picked up the phone, called his secretary and said, "Get me so and so." So and so was his liaison with Arafat. And he did on several occasions act as a go-between between Arafat and the Israelis as I recall, particularly in relation to some prisoner exchanges.

Q: Were you ever called upon to use this channel on the part of the United States to get to Arafat?

KAISER: I'm faced now with a dilemma. There was something I was, I know I was told on a completely secret basis. It involved a couple of people who I have a great deal of respect for who had no reason to believe that I knew what I knew. It would have been embarrassing to them if they knew that I knew it. All I'm saying to you is, it related to Arafat.

Q: Well, we had this prohibition of talking to Arafat, which struck many in the diplomat community - you know, if you're going to have diplomacy, you talk to everybody. And we had this, I think it was Kissinger who set this up with the Israelis, where we promised not to talk to Arafat, which was a diplomatic blunder.

KAISER: Until what's his name was allowed to talk to him in Tunis, after the Oslo agreement.

Q: Pelletreau, I think it was. I belong to the school of thought that as soon as you start forbidding designated people, not everyone, but designated people to talk to somebody you're abdicating a great deal of responsibility.

KAISER: The person I'm defending is dead. That's why I'm hesitating. It's a kind of a moral dilemma.

Q: I think talking to Arafat, considering everything that's gone on since then, we've had Arafat a guest of the White House a couple of times. It's not, they were early days and people were doing things. I'm not trying to pry a name out, but I don't see that this has any opprobrium at this point.

KAISER: I will say this, that Kreisky did everything he could (laughs) to get an American ambassador to talk to Arafat. He made a big deal out of his Arafat relationship. It was a big thing and I remember once I said to him, "If, as you're saying, Arafat wants to make peace with the Israelis, why don't you get him to say so publicly?" I could talk to him, Kreisky, the way I'm talking to you. He said he couldn't do that. His extremists would assassinate him if he publicly announced it.

Q: Well, I think the issue for so long was that we refused to talk to the PLO until the PLO renounced its idea of, the PLO would not recognize Israel as a state. The PLO rhetoric at the time was that they would sweep the Israelis to the Mediterranean and take over. This is extremist talk, but it didn't, it was in a way our excuse for not talking to Arafat.

KAISER: I want to say something here that I should have mentioned when we talked about the emigration of the Soviet Jews. The contrast between the way we treated Soviet Jews' immigration to the United States and the way we treated German Jews who tried to get in here is absolutely very striking. A very striking difference. Makes us look really pretty bad.

Q: Are you talking about before the war?

KAISER: Yes.

Q: Oh, yes, it was terrible.

KAISER: A terrible chapter.

Q: Well, it was part of our whole immigration policy, plus there was a strong anti-Semitic feeling in the United States.

KAISER: In the State Department.

Q: In the State Department, yes.

KAISER: The number of Jews in the State Department, you could count them on the fingers of one hand. But they had one guy whose name was Herbert Feis, you know that name? He was a key economic advisor on the Board of Economic Warfare, brilliant.

Q: He was very much involved in Spanish wolfram. I'm not sure what wolfram was, but it was an important.

KAISER: A very important method, I know, during the war. It was something you needed for making sophisticated equipment.

Q: I know this was a big subject and he was the expert on it.

KAISER: The guy in charge of immigration was a bad apple. The difference - Scoop Jackson had a great deal to do, Senator Jackson, with the different attitude about emigrating Jews, but we went out of our way to get the Soviets to allow Jews to enter.

Q: This was the Jackson Vanik Amendment, which dominated our relations with the Soviet Union. This brought, it basically said, "Let your Jews that want to, leave." And essentially it worked.

KAISER: And we'll give you MFN.

Q: Yes, most favored nations, yes.

KAISER: When I went to Russia with Tip O'Neill, have I talked about that? It was long after I'd left the Foreign Service. Tip asked me to go along with him as his special consultant on a congressional mission to Moscow. and he had a list. Special Jews, that he wanted to talk to, that he did talk to, top Soviet officials. We didn't have any list that we talked to Adolf Hitler about.

Q: Well, it was a whole different world. What about the Soviet presence at the time you were and this was '79 to '80, the time you were ambassador in Vienna. What was the Soviet presence like there?

KAISER: That's a good question. In contrast to Hungary, in contrast to Senegal, I don't remember having any special relationship with the Soviet ambassador to Vienna. The Viennese feeling toward Moscow was not very friendly. After all they had lived under Soviet occupation for quite a while, and it was not an agreeable chapter. I don't remember, to be perfectly frank, any special relationship with the Russian ambassador. I had a very good relationship with the one in Budapest, who was the dean and a very good one. In Dakar, his son became a leading dissident, the poor father had a document how his father was treated after his son openly became a dissident. His father was treated like the scum of the universe. It was documented in The Sun Came Out which was written by his son describing what had happened to his father because he had become a dissident.

Q: Well, it probably is significant that you don't recall because in other words they weren't playing much of a role there. I think by this time Austria had except in name sort of shut all this neutrality stuff and was basically in thought, word and deed part of the West.

KAISER: I think you put it very well. They were not loathe to make it clear that they really belonged to the free world. At the same time, Kreisky tried to exploit when Nixon visited. Did he have visits with the Soviets? I think he did, Nixon. On one or two occasions they met in Austria with Kreisky acting as host.

Q: There were Iranian students all over the United States and Western Europe during the takeover of our embassy and all. Were they causing trouble, Iranian students?

KAISER: Not to my knowledge. I don't know if I told you this. I was in Budapest when our colleagues were taken hostage in Tehran, and we got instructions to go see the foreign minister and tell them to put pressure on the Iranian government to release the hostages. I always dealt with the deputy foreign minister who was in charge of the West. The foreign minister himself was of very little value. The deputy was a very able cookie with a lot of influence. He was the top brass and very good English. He went to a high school which specialized in the teaching of English. So, I made this plea on behalf of our colleagues in Tehran, and he listened very well. He said, "You must remember, there are two sides to this question." Well, I let loose, I gave him a blast of criticism, just really. I said, "You are a professional diplomat and you are telling me and you are saying that the two sides to an issue where the host country does what Tehran has done?" And I whiplashed him. I really whiplashed him. And he backed away. The following week I was having lunch with one of his ministers and this minister was a good friend of mine. The deputy foreign minister had said to him, "Whatever you do, don't tell the American ambassador that you think there are two sides to the question."

Q: Is there anything else we should cover on Vienna before we end this session?

KAISER: No, except the story where Kreisky associated himself with Disraeli as a Jewish person who made it to the top. Also, a self-serving story where I net him that Mitterrand was going to going to defeat Giscard D'Estaing, and he sort of made some remark about "You may know something about American politics, but you really know nothing about French politics." Then I saw him as a private citizen afterwards to collect my 10 shillings. All he could say was, "Well, you were more optimistic than I was."

Q: Yes, because Mitterrand was a socialist and Kreisky was a socialist, but nobody was sure who was going to win in that election.

KAISER: I betted with his protï¿½gï¿½e who is today president of Austria. Fischer. But Fischer paid me the 10 shillings; Kreisky never paid.

Q: We'll pick this up when you left Vienna in 1980 after the election year and Carter was out and Reagan came in.

Q: Today is the first of November, 2005. Let's talk a bit, what have you been doing in the quarter century since you left public service?

KAISER: Well, I've been retired. I'm 92 years old now. I've been doing too much in a way, but there were passes made at me to go into lobbying when I got here. People wanted to involve me in some Austrian projects and Hungarian projects. I made it very clear that that was one thing that I was not going to do. I was not going to be a lobbyist. I did a little teaching at Johns Hopkins for two semesters.

Q: This would have been SAIS (School of Advanced International Studies).

KAISER: SAIS, on the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. I had to do quite a bit of work on them actually. I did make a tie with Stanford Research International, which is what it says. It's an international group that does studies and they have some very good people. They dropped the Stanford name and they call it SRI International. I was kind of a thinker for them. They paid me a modest monthly fee and we got involved with an interesting project where we lined up international bankers particularly, a group, and gave them a monthly briefing. We would get congressmen, senators to pay a modest fee, enough to run this operation. I was just a top advisor. And, all of this enabled me to write my memoirs, which I did.

Q: And you have a book.

KAISER: I was involved, I was on the board of the British American Ditchley Foundation. I was very active on that board. I was first on the British board and then on the American board. Cy Vance was chairman of it. He asked me to come on. The Ditchley Foundation was founded by Sir David Wills, a very wealthy, lovely British man. It was cigarette money actually. It was one of the most famous cigarette companies in England. He bought this beautiful estate with an historic house on it, 17th Century, and it's the house to which Churchill repaired during the war and during the full moon period. Because in the full moon the Nazi bombers had easy access to 10 Downing Street, so he would move away and stay there during that period. The Ditchley Foundation runs about 10 to 12 conferences a year. I would usually go to one or two and I would be pretty active in helping pick, helping decide the subjects to confer on and lining up the people, inviting the people on the American side. This took a fair amount of my time. I'm still on the board, but my son has kind of inherited my spot. That was my major pro bono thing that I did. And I was involved politically. I was interested in what was going on. I was active in Democratic politics with whatever free time I had. I was well occupied during this period.

Q: Why don't we talk just a little bit about your impressions of the foreign policy of Ronald Reagan?

KAISER: Well I have a beef. I didn't express it at the speech I mentioned it the other day. I think it is a gross exaggeration to say that Ronald Reagan ended the Cold War. The man who ended the Cold War, the man who won the Cold War or made it possible to win the Cold War was, you can choose a phrase you like best, is Harry Truman.

Q: Oh, absolutely. He drew the line.

KAISER: He drew the line and he produced a policy, one of the most dramatic international initiatives in our history, the Marshall Plan, which really in all of its facets saved Western Europe from being overrun by the Soviet Union. Some of the Europeans appreciated that, like Professor Rappard at the University of Geneva who was a colleague of mine on the governing body of the International Labor Organization, a very famous international historian, equally facile, English, French and Italian. People forget that there are arcane tongues in Switzerland so that Italian is the official language. He was, very interesting, Stu. He was a protï¿½gï¿½e of a fellow called Woodrow Wilson and when he was in his early '20s he was at the Versailles Treaty negotiations. Somehow or other he got to know Wilson. Well, I talked early about the Marshall Plan. Maybe I didn't talk about it enough.

This other thing just annoys the hell out of me.. It's when these characters who are running our government today compare -

Q: We're talking the Bush II administration.

KAISER: - compare what they're doing now to the Marshall Plan (laughs). The only difference is that Western Europe; we didn't build any nations. We just removed the horrendous Nazi occupation and what we had were democracies of several centuries in some instances. The German democracy, going back to pre World War I, was one of the most vigorous in the world. The trade union movement was clearly the most powerful trade union movement in the world. Every one of the countries we helped with Marshall aid - including, by the way, you can throw in Japan - had a previous history of democratic life for decades if not hundreds of years. We were not creating new societies. We were just removing this terrible, terrible Nazi regime that had enveloped them all. One forgets, too, I might add, that immediately at the end of the war, several of them, not all of them, had in their governments when democracy was reestablished - just by defeating Hitler - communist in their early governments. Subsequently, the communists were removed, lost their status. So that to compare what we're doing in Iraq now with what we did in Western Europe with the Marshall Plan is about as ridiculous, as ludicrous, as it could be.

Also, I think I must have mentioned it earlier, one of the turning points of the Cold War, in addition to the Marshall Plan, was a continuing effort over the years, very well organized. The Marshall Plan had a unit separate from our embassy. Each of the recipient countries had a Marshall Plan agency that worked closely with the embassy, and they did a superb job. They had some wonderful characters: Tom Fidler, and of course Averell Harriman was head of the whole thing in New York.

Going back to Ditchley, it was always a prominent Britisher, civil servant or historian, who was the director of the operation. It was a very high class operation, with the elite of the British. The American board was a pretty good board, not quite as elegant as the British. Do you mind if I mention one guy in particular, the first director, Wheeler-Bennett. He is the number one diplomatic historian between the two wars. Brilliant. He wrote the best book on the Munich crisis. He was a great expert on Nazi Germany. He was the first secretary general of Ditchley. He was a great friend of mine. He always gave me credit in his prefaces, usually more than I deserved. In one of them listing the names who had helped him, he had "the late Philip Kaiser." When he gave me a copy, I have it here, he referred to that "with pleasure that he lives" and he referred to a page in his autobiography in which he talks about Dorothy Thompson getting off the boat in Europe during the war. She was very sick and a correspondent gave the impression that she was dead and then it turned out that she was alive, so the phrase emerged, "with pleasure that she lives." John Major, the ex-prime minister served a secretary general at one point. The present guy was the latest UN ambassador. The secretary general is always British. I spent a lot of time on Ditchley

Q: I was wondering whether you would like to comment on the state today of what you could call - or is there one? - the foreign affairs establishment in the United States. You definitely belong to what was the foreign affairs establishment which was both Republican and Democratic, mainly east coast.

KAISER: Well, I tell you I'm going to start with the end. I was just thinking last night of a kind of a mini tragedy for the State Department. What do I mean about that? There was a general feeling. When Colin Powell was appointed Secretary of State, the State Department will finally be able to really fulfill its statutory obligation. There would be a revival of the State Department. What a tragedy has ensued. Scowcroft, Cheney, Rumsfeld

Q: Cheney, Vice President and Rumsfeld,, the Secretary of Defense.

KAISER: What a job they've done on Colin Powell.

Q: It's a great tragedy. A personal tragedy and a national tragedy.

KAISER: We've gone through, you know it as well as I, the clichï¿½s. "How are things going?" "Oh, we've got these problems at the State Department." You can list historically at any stage, people are always beefing that something's wrong with the State Department. Foreign Service officers are very good at that. In my lifetime, the high point was Dean Acheson and that relationship, not only his own talents, which were remarkable, wonderful character. I cherish that friend. Nothing gives me more pleasure than looking at that picture and noticing the inscription. He's the only guy I have who I didn't work for. We were very good friends. I got to know him when I was assistant secretary for international affairs at the Labor Department. We did things together. And his relationship with Truman: he had the kind of relationship that people thought Powell was going to have with Bush. That was the high point of the Secretary of State: powerful, dominant in international affairs, close relationship to the president who had the fullest confidence in him.

I remember at a lunch with Acheson, after Kennedy came to power, and he saw me just after Dean Rusk got appointed. He was a good guy, but got enmeshed in Vietnam. It was terrible. Dean Acheson said to me, "I beat Walter Lippman on that one." I can't remember who Walter Lippmann's candidate was for secretary of state. Acheson picked Rusk. Kennedy listened to Acheson. Condi Rice doesn't seem to be looming very large in recent events. It's a sad fact.

Q: You belong to a multiplicity of organizations here. Do you find that the foreign affairs establishment in Washington has today has, where does it stand? I mean is there one that is sort of a joint group of people with Republican and Democratic proclivities? Are they together?

KAISER: I think the Council on Foreign Relations is the outstanding organization dealing with foreign affairs problems, which is non-partisan. Like this morning, there was a breakfast in time in which the speakers were Lugar and the Barak Obama.

Q: He's an African American, very impressive.

KAISER: If there's ever going to be a black president, he'll be the first one.

Q: Yes.

KAISER: You know there's an organization now by an ex-ambassador, what's his name? I can't think of his name. Setting up a new organization with headquarters on Capitol Hill. Foreign policy, I have a letter asking me whether I would be willing to have my name on the board.

This really goes all the way back to FDR. Secretaries of Statin FDR's time, he had little use for them.

Q: He had no use for the secretaries of State, it was Cordell Hall the whole time and Sumner Wells was the man who did it.

KAISER: Classmates.

Q: But he had no regard for the Foreign Service.

KAISER: Truman did.

Q: But Roosevelt didn't.

KAISER: Truman appointed more career ambassadors than all the previous presidents put together.

Q: Oh, yes that wouldn't have been hard (laughs).

KAISER: Very easy. Maybe two dozen.

Q: You were closely involved in the '30s on with the labor movement. The labor movement has changed so much in the United States now. It's almost hard to think of labor as being a factor anymore.

KAISER: It's a great loss to our society. In my latter day innocence, the innocence that 90 year old individuals are entitled to have, when we started building democracy in Iraq, I called John Sweeney, who I know, the head of the AFL CIO. I said, "Don't you think you ought to consider the establishment of trade unions as an essential institution for a democratic society?" "Well," he said, "We're familiar with that." The State Department now has a division, which I had in the labor department in labor affairs and I think there's still labor attaches. They have an advisory committee of top trade union guys. I don't know what the hell they do. At one time, Sweeney wanted to be a consultant to that group of trade union leaders. The guy who ran it - what timing - wasn't interested in having Phil Kaiser get into this act.

In my time the labor movement was a powerful part of the American democratic society. Big names: John Lewis, Walter Reuther, Sidney Hillman, David Dubinsky, George Harrison, these were all. Do you remember when Truman was being picked by Roosevelt's people having a guy from Missouri, remember the famous phrase, "Clear it with Sidney?" That gives you an idea, and there's no doubt whatever if you look at it, labor played a major role in the election of Truman in 1948.

Q: Oh, yes.

KAISER: All of this is gone. Tragic really. We've still got the auto and steelworkers unions. We've lost a lot of the industries that moved abroad. On the other hand it's almost pathetic that the UAW, which was one of our most powerful unions, has not been able to organize a single foreign automobile company. You will note, Stu, that they're all, the foreign companies are all located in anti-labor territory.

Q: Mainly in the South, North Carolina. Well, I think this might be a good place to stop. I want to thank you very much and we may pick this up again some other time. Great, thank you.

End of interview